

"This is a kind of epic that all can consume, that compromises nothing...."

-Binyavanga Wainaina

WANJOHI WA MAKOKHA

NEST OF STONES

Kenyan Narratives in Verse



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NEST OF STONES

KENYAN NARRATIVES IN VERSE

Wanjohi Wa Makokha



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Foreword

If demonstrating the artistic skill to imaginatively enter, capture and portray a delicate, significant historical moment memorably, is the writer's foremost challenge, Wanjohi wa Makokha has more than succeeded in fulfilling this mission through his poetry collection, *A Nest of Stones*. Moreover, he has evoked the experience with such authenticity and intensity that we, as his readers, have in turn been captured by the drama of the moment. He has done this by making his readers relive the horrors and terror of the beastly stampede that shook Kenya like an earthquake almost three years ago, unleashing wanton blood-letting orgies that ravaged the land, leaving up to 1,500 people dead and 250, 000 displaced (read homeless), according to *Wikipedia*. Some of the murders were so brutal that the corpses of the victims were unidentifiable. Homes and farms were torched, as were some churches where people had taken sanctuary. There were reports of mothers, children and babies being pushed back into the flames as they were trying to escape from the burning buildings. Young girls and women were raped - some of the targets being senior elders - and yet others sodomized. Horrendous hate crimes, too many to name, were enacted in the dark of the night as well as in open daylight between December 2007 and particularly, in the early months of 2008. The benign term, "Post Election Violence (PEV)," by which this outrage has come to be known, is a sad mockery of the torturous nightmare that innocent Kenyans were subjected to. Indeed, the wounds inflicted cut so deep that they will take ages to heal and even then, they will leave behind permanent scars telling horrendous tales of the brutality unleashed. In this regard, the bodies of survivors of rape and other sexual atrocities are lacerated with ugly marks that will last a lifetime. Their psychological space will permanently be invaded and haunted by the torturous images of their violators.

Refusing to condone what my friend, Ama Ata Aidoo, the celebrated woman writer from Ghana, calls "self-willed

amnesia,” Makokha deliberately and unsparingly reopens these wounds, shocking us with their rawness. By so doing, he succeeds in achieving several goals. One, he exposes and indicts the perpetrators of these beastly crimes; two, he stirs the conscience of anyone who would try to rationalize or excuse the atrocities and most importantly, he demands that Kenyans assume collective responsibility in denouncing what happened, with a view to making sure that it never happens again. Dialectically and simultaneously too, he reminds us, with remarkable optimism, of our inherent human potential to yield counter narratives that are altogether antithetical to the enactment of hate crimes. To paraphrase James Baldwin in a famous statement from “Autobiographical Notes,” *Notes of a Native Son*, Makokha has ‘relentlessly forced from this experience the last drop, bitter or sweet, it can possibly give’ - yet another mark of a good writer.

Makokha’s poetry belongs to a category I describe as “luring poesy,” which absorbs the reader involuntarily, as distinguished from “alienating poetry,” by the end of which the reader feels as if s/he has been through mental assault. An illustrative anecdote is in place here. During “ancient” times, when I was a school girl in the 1950s and 1960s, it was not unusual to see a long line form at our boarding school’s sick bay on days and times when there was an English poetry class. Many of us students hated poetry with such a passion that we would do anything, including wishing sickness on ourselves, in an effort to avoid it. We found the genre not just boring and irrelevant to our lives, but enigmatic to the point of demoralization. The language used defied us as to crack its stone wall of words that taunted us with their rock-hard impenetrability.

The poetry collected in this thought-provoking volume is deep, layered, subtle and linguistically sophisticated, it is never alienating. In fact, once I started reading the manuscript, the crafty artistry and compelling power of his words became so magnetic that I did not want to put the collection down.

Makokha is a poet with an amazing grasp of his craft. He would have easily aced my creative writing course in which I regularly use the following statements to define some of the skills a poet should demonstrate: the ability to evoke experiences, scenes and phenomena with striking uniqueness; the fusion of content and form; the ability to articulate the message with the magic and power of words that will make them forever memorable; the skill to manipulate, squeeze and caress words persuading them to yield meaning; the eye and brush to decorate utterance with figurative expression and then engage in the artistic patterning of thought that will give the piece enticing visual beauty as well as captivating rhythmic flow.

The poet has demonstrated these skills and many more. His poetry is teeming with figures of speech turning each piece into an intricate weave of figurative expression. For instance, “blood,” “stones” and “voice” are so imbedded in the poetry that they operate at multiple levels, serving as: running commentaries; metaphors; extended metaphors; images; symbols and so on. Many of the pieces are also so artistically structured that they look like tangible objects. Their shapes call to mind all kinds of suggestive symbolic images, including those of: a human figure, a woman’s body, a mausoleum, a stone, a cup, a victor’s trophy, a matchstick, a machete, a rope, a blood drop, a tear-drop, a grotto, a map of Kenya and others. Even more fascinating is the way the line structures appear to be flowing in and out as if expanding and contracting, curving and then sharpening, etc. The written pieces seem to embody “movement” of some sort – to become objects in motion.

Lastly, a comment on the poet’s overall vision as it unfolds through the content of the poetry is critical. The width, depth and freshness/originality of his coverage are impressive. He knows Kenya’s history, geography and diverse cultural heritages intimately. Constantly, he reminds Kenyans of their collective history, common ancestry, similarities and commonalities in their diverse heritages, shared space and the movements of people across history that have created many

diasporas of peoples within the nation. He is the voice of reason indicting the irrationality that breeds ethnic phobia depicting it as a form of self-destruction. Arty uses of the literary ideas of the macabre and the grotesque help him deliver the point home further. His voice is so compelling, illustrative and passionate that it leaves one wondering what all the infighting over the years has been about about. In his closing poems, the poet bonds with the younger generation by using Sheng', reminding us that among other historical contributions, the youth of Kenya have created a new, cross-ethnic language that could act as a barrier breaker and unifier if constructively used.

Makokha's love for his motherland, for peace and for life in general is truly touching, as is his passion for poetry, orature, literature and art in general. Drawing heavily from Kenya's commonwealth of orature, cultural and historical traditions, he has not only affirmed critical indigenous sites of knowledge, but celebrated the rainbow beauty of their diversity. His voice is unique, his writing sophisticated and his poetry firmly grounded in the strong tradition of progressive resistance literature.

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Biography

I was born in Kenya in a Catholic missionary hospital in Nairobi, The Mater Misericordiae near the GoDown Arts Centre on 21st July, 1979 to a Gĩkũyũ mother and a Bukusu father who named me Justus Siboe Makokha. However, according to Bantu naming custom, the second son of a home carries, often silently, the name of his maternal grandfather. It is from Wanjohi wa Muiri (1924 – 2002), father of my mother, that I, as a second son in our family, invoke Wanjohi as my pen name: Wanjohi wa Makokha, Wanjohi son of Makokha. There exists a rich tradition within East African poetry, especially in Kiswahili, across Kenya and Tanzania whereby poets or versesmiths (malenga) pick up descriptive titles (soubriquets) for themselves that bespeak their trade and location of its practice. In Kenya, Wallah bin Wallah talks of *Malenga wa Ziwa Kuu* (Versesmith of the Great Lake), Kimani wa Mbogo refers to himself as *Malenga wa Gatundu* (Versesmith of Gatundu), Zahed Mngumi, *Malenga wa Lamu* (Versesmith of Lamu), Ustadh Mti-Mle *Malenga wa Vumba* (Versesmith of Vumba), Ahmad Nassir bin Juma Bhalo (also known as Ustadh Balo) *Malenga wa Mvita* (Versesmith of Mombasa). Mwinyihatibu Mohamed of Tanzania is also called *Malenga wa Mrima* (Versesmith of Mrima) and his countryman Mwiti-o-M'Marete goes by the name *Malenga wa Mlima Meru* (Versesmith of Mount Meru). Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi and Kulikoyela K. Kahigi of Tanzania came up with title *Malenga wa Bara* (Versesmith of the hinterland) in 1976. They helped free the word “malenga” from its exclusive usage for many years along the long Swahili coast of eastern Africa and as a strict reference of a city or village of birth or residence by the poet using it. They talked of versesmiths or bards of the hinterland in general rather than of a particular *coastal* city or even hinterland *location* as is the case in the other examples cited above. It is in this spirit that I as a writer of verse came up with my soubriquet in keeping with the long tradition of such practice among the writing bards of the

East Africa. Using the fact that my parents come from two different ethnic groups in a country where ethnic belonging is a powerful social and political base of identity, I coined the soubriquet *Malenga wa Damu Panda* (Versesmith at the junction of bloods) for myself to emphasise the idea of inter-marriage across ethnic divides as a pathway to a stronger nationhood in Kenya. Wanjohi, a Gikũyũ name from central Kenya, and Makokha, a Bukusu name from western Kenya, came together to name Wanjohi wa Makokha – *Malenga wa Damu Panda*.

After the nursery years in Nairobi, in 1984 our family moved to Eldoret near the Great Rift Valley, a former white settler community area once known by the odd name “64”. I attended Uasin Gishu Primary School (formerly Government Indian School) between 1986 and 1993, after two pre-primary preparatory years at the Muslim Nursery School. I moved to Bungoma High School in Western Kenya in 1994 and graduated with distinctions in English, Religion Studies and History after sitting the O-Level Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) national examinations four years later.

From early 1998 to July 1999, I practised small scale maize farming and ran a second-hand clothes business in the small rural community of Kauka Area (Nyange Village) in Kimilili Constituency. The densely-populated village is near where the mighty River Nzoia, which descends from Mount Elgon, separates Bungoma District from Lugari District at Mitua before racing south then west across the grasslands of Western Kenya to greet and hug the Victoria Nyanza in distant Luoland after a journey of 257 kilometres. This vast ancient land of my paternal ancestors is spectacular in its natural beauty. Since independence it is a teeming home to hardworking maize-farming communities made up of several ethnicities such as the dominant Babukusu, their other Abaluhya kinsmen like the Abatachoni, and their olden neighbours, the Sabaot (both the Bok and the Kony), the Bongomek and the Pokot. Recent times have seen new communities from peoples of other parts of Kenya such as the Agikuyu, the Abagusii, the Maragoli, the

Nandi, the Turkana, the Somali and even Indians settle in various urban and rural centres across this native land. The lush landscape of the land of my forefathers rolls from the Nzoia westward to the lower hills of Masaaba (Mountain of God), or Mount Elgon as it is known to the world, deriving its name from the little known Kony people who also live on its eastern slopes. Ol Doinyo Ilgoon (Breast Mountain or Mountain of Breast) is the name of the same mountain to the Uasin Gishu Maasai (also known as Gwas Nkishu) who for several centuries bygone also occupied parts of this native land. There is no wonder why the mountain and its surrounding plain has captured both the minds and poets alike, such as the distinguished Christopher Henry Muwanga Barlow of Uganda who wrote of its majesty after beholding it from the lush western slopes in the land of the Ugandan Abagisu, blood cousins of the Ababukusu of Kenya. Stretching for over 3400 square kilometres and rising to a remarkable altitude of 4,321 metres this majestic Mountain of God and the surrounding agricultural plains of His people continues to inspire many a mind even today and I am not an exception. It is this background that offers, in part, a discernable pastoral tang throughout my poetic oeuvre. The tang is in turn carried on my mind's tongue to imbue my artistic sensibilities with a deep belief in the sanctity of the natural environment and its importance to our own wellness and that of life around us.

In September 2009, I joined Kenyatta University in Nairobi to pursue an undergraduate degree course, Bachelor of Education (Arts) with English and Literature as core teaching subjects. I graduated with distinctions in several courses and immediately joined a Master of Arts program in the same Literature Department three years later. I was awarded, on merit, the Kenyatta University Staff Development scholarship and the *Katholischer Akademischer Ausländer Dienst* (KAAD) scholarship in support of my graduate studies in 2003. I taught English and Literature at Kariobangi South Secondary School during my early graduate years. Finally, I graduated with an MA

in 2006 after conducting research on the early fiction of M. G. Vassanji and reading scholarly papers in various international conferences in Kenya and Tanzania. I worked briefly for Kwani Trust who publish the internationally acclaimed creative writing journal, *Kwani?* in Nairobi. In 2006 and 2007 I worked as an education consultant with the Scandinavian organisation, International Aid Services (IAS) developing and teaching courses in English to teams of teachers from Berbera and Sheikh, two key towns in the Saaxil province of Somaliland - the self-governing north-western territory of Somalia. I joined the Institut für Englische Philologie at the Freie Universität Berlin in the spring of 2008 on a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) doctoral research scholarship after a German language course at the Herder Institute of the University of Leipzig. I currently live in Neukölln district to the east of Berlin. It is a large immigrant neighbourhood with people from all corners of the world.

Introduction

Instruction in youth is like engraving in stone
Berber Saying

My nascent interest in poetry goes back to the classroom experience of my early years of O-levels (1994 – 1997) at Bungoma High School in Western Kenya. The singular lessons of the talented English teachers Mr. Elijah Moga and Mrs. Margaret Nyonje encouraged me to pursue a Bachelor of Education degree, specialising in English and Literature. Their elementary contributions cannot be forgotten. The two come from well-known families of educators in Kenya's Western Province. Elijah Moga's brother, Adalo Moga is a notable teacher of Literature at Maseno University. Kisa Amateshe, a renowned poet and poetry teacher at Kenyatta University is Mrs Nyonje's brother. It is because of him that Mrs Nyonje as my final year English teacher in high school encouraged me to seek admission in the Literature Department at Kenyatta University, which over time has been the home of major names in Kenyan literature such as Leonard Kibera, Jane Nandwa, Francis Imbuga, Wasambo Were, David Mulwa, Egara Kabaji, the late Ezekiel Alembi as well as internationally acclaimed critics of African literature Austin Bukenya and Nana Wilson-Tagoe.

Kisa Amateshe took me under his patronage as a poet and unfolded the buds of writing in me. He was instrumental in helping me to pursue poetry as a serious undertaking, in addition to my regular courses. I pursued courses in theory and criticism but studied creative writing privately under Amateshe. The co-curricular pursuit of poetry enabled me to join Poetry Lab, a student poetry discussion group. It was headed by the renowned Kenyan poetess Caroline Nderitu in those heydays at the turn of the century. Popular Kenyan radio presenters KJ, Kajairo as well the last-born of the Amateshe family, Maurice, who teaches at Kenyatta University too, were some of the

colleagues with whom I interacted during those years of formation.

After graduating from my undergraduate studies in 2002, I had the misfortune of losing to two Nairobi muggers, a handwritten manuscript of about 43 poems. The poems had been written during my bachelor degree program and the vacations in-between. The script was entitled, “Detonations of Silence”. I am grateful I did not lose my life or any faculty of my body in that swift but bizarre incident at Kahawa Wendani opposite the Kahawa Garrison north of Nairobi. The blow to my creative mind was severe. I was disillusioned and desperate. I put up handwritten posters announcing a modest reward of a phone calling card voucher for the person who would return the manuscript to me. The only hope I was holding to was that the manuscript may have been thrown in a ditch after the brutal muggers realised that my lap top satchel had nothing valuable to them. Nothing ever happened. My literary focus turned to criticism, in which I later became entrenched so much that it forms the axis of my teaching profession nowadays.

At the encouragement of a recently retired editor of the *Kenyatta University Weekly* and friend, Mr. Bojana, I started making occasional contributions to the poetry column in 2004 in this varsity print. Some of these poems would later appear in *The People*, a popular daily newspaper in Nairobi. I am grateful to Kipkurui K'telwa, a former editor with the newspaper and currently with *The Standard*, for enabling me to share my poetry with readers. He published several of my articles on the arts, culture and pedagogy as well as some of my poetry of that time. He made me earn a feather on my cap as a bard with a “tabloid audience” in the manner of Niyi Osundare, the distinguished Nigerian poet. The platform of a national newspaper helped me reconsider my diction and creative language use. I recognised the publics at Kenyatta University who read the poems when published in *Kenyatta University Weekly* were not the same ones who read the same poems when published for a newspaper readership. They could be, but the newspaper reader

community was broader and with various levels of education. The language of my poetry had to be tailored to fit both academic readers and general public. This shift into a more popular diction that is devoid of sophistry has endured and is evident in this collection of the poems. I believe a Kenyan poet has no business writing verse if the main purpose of his undertaking is speaking to himself. Thought is a better mode of communication for such a poet. Poetry is public and communicative or nothing.

In the years between 2002 and 2006, I immersed myself in the literary circles of Nairobi. It is during this period that I had the opportunity to be lectured by major African writers such as Nuruddin Farah, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Taban lo Liyong, Ali Mazrui and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Attending their public lectures, and doing a reading from Armah's novels before him, confirmed to me further that I was on the path of my kismet - the path of becoming a weaver of words in the service of society. Encouragement also came from established voices of my own generation such as Binyavanga Wainaina and Yvonne Owuor. The two Caine Prize winners enabled me to work briefly at *Kwani?* Trust. This tenure allowed me to be acquainted with other writers from West and South Africa such as Hope Eghagha from Nigeria, Doreen Baingana from Uganda and Ntone Edjabe, who hails from Cameroon but who edits the influential journal *Chimurenga* in South Africa. It was while at *Kwani?* that I was able to meet and be deeply inspired by the novelist M. G. Vassanji and the poet Shailja Patel. We met during the SLS Writers' Seminars in Nairobi, and during a Writers' Retreat in Lamu, an ancient island town in the Indian Ocean off the northern coast of Kenya. Though born in Kenya to Kenyan parents, the two writers currently live abroad in Canada and United States of America respectively but travel often to East Africa where they still have family ties. They were in Kenya for the 2005 International *Kwani?* LitFest. All these decorated writers remain an inspiration to me in more ways than one. I later had the privilege of working closely with Chris

Lukorito Wanjala of University of Nairobi as a critic interviewing writers and publishers in his popular radio show “The Literary Giant”. The program is broadcast on the English Service of the national broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) on Sundays. Chris is a famous critic of African literature and an established teacher at the University of Nairobi. He was a student of Ngugi, Okot, Micere and Taban, a contemporary of Jane Nandwa, Eddah Gachukia and taught with Ba Tejani, Simon Gikandi among others in the golden years of the 1970s when literature was a key pivot of Kenyan intellectual life. He remains a committed voice in the changing literary landscape of the country. Through him, I made acquaintance with established Kenyan writers such as David Gian Maillu as well as emerging voices such as Stephen Derwent Partington, Joseph Situma and Onduko Bw`Atebe among others. Our conversations and polemics helped me see the role of art, the artist and the critic in a society like Kenya even more clearly. Chris was very instrumental in cultivating my abiding interest in bridging pedagogy as a profession and the culture of practising literary criticism publicly. I remain indebted to him and the radio programme producer at KBC, Henry Makokha (no relation). To all these men and women of honour I say *Shukrani*.

Relocation to Germany in the autumn of 2007, after tenure as an educational consultant and course instructor in north-western Somalia (Somaliland), had its own impact. In the warm loneliness of an international student hostel in Leipzig, the mind returned to the call of the inside, namely poetry. I started re-writing some of the poems that had been published during my graduate years. However, it was the botched General Election of December, 2007 that finally awakened the passion of poetry in me. Sometimes what combustion does a patriotic poet need more than the vicissitudes of diaspora or a howling winter and images televised globally of his distant homeland descending into a political abyss whose depth and darkness was hitherto unknown?

Most of the poems in this collection emerge out of howls of the souls that were burning and bleeding to death in Kenya during the world infamous Post-Election Violence (PEV) of early 2008 and late 2007. These souls fled Kenya and flew across the vastness of the beige sands of Sudan, crossed the Nile near Darfur then the vast bluish-green waters of the Mediterranean Sea, by way of the Egyptian sand valleys of the dead, before bouncing on the white acres of the grand Alps and entered wintry Germany with shrieks all the way to a certain neighbourhood in Leipzig to find refuge in my mind. They took over the government of my brain and appointed Conscience their leader. I lost weight. I became dishevelled. I wore my hair and beard to lengths unknown before to me and my colleagues. I withdrew from socialisation. I refused to eat real food and survived only on tap water and Turkish bread as well as translations of Friedrich von Schiller (1759 – 1805) and Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832), two giants of German literature who had once lived here in Leipzig too. It is at the height of this decadence that I remembered that the Schiller Haus was located in the neighbourhood. I had been reading German works since winter arrived. The famous poet and playwright Schiller wrote some of his celebrated literature in this very house in the quiet neighbourhood of the Gohlis suburb. I had always known that it stood a stone's throw away from my tiny cube but had hitherto had no lust to visit it. The great poet had lived in this beautiful house, now the oldest literary museum in Leipzig, from the spring to autumn of 1785. I went to his chamber upstairs and stood where he had stood 222 years ago. I let him speak to me, yet again.

Liberty, Equality! Men hear sounding,
The tranquil burgher takes up arms,
The streets and halls are all abounding,
And roving, draw the murd'ring swarms;
Then women to hyenas growing
Do make with horror jester's art,
Still quiv'ring, panther's teeth employing,

They rip apart the en'my's heart.
Naught holy is there more, and cleaving
Are bonds of pious modesty,
The good its place to bad is leaving,
And all the vices govern free.
To rouse the lion, is dang'rous error,
And ruinous is the tiger's bite,
Yet is most terrible the terror

Of man in his deluded state ('Song of the Bell', 1839).

The excruciating cold during this tour of anxiety to Mr. Schiller's abode of old was no bother to me. It was nothing compared to the heat in my heart as the image on international TV of an anxious Chief Electoral Commissioner Samuel Kivuitu sandwiched between two of his Commissioners announcing the outcome of the disputed national election on the government broadcasting corporation's TV and opening the lid of Chaos. I know some of the corridors of Kenya Broadcasting Corporation fairly well. I know a couple of studios there that resemble the one from where he made the announcement at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre or was it in KBC? Most Kenyans are not quite sure of the exact location where the poll results were announced though they know it the KBC that aired the announcement. However, don't most Kenyan government facilities have offices that look alike? Anyway as I said earlier, I have worked with Chris Wanjala at KBC before and I could almost feel the air of that office Kivuitu was breathing as his words threw a match in slow motion to the tinderbox of patience, and Kenya exploded. The cold Leipzig breeze that numbed my ears also hid my tears well. It is a peculiar sight indeed to come across a grown up African man walking aimlessly across a wintry German town in the East with stilled tears blurring his pupils like a desolate Goethean soul lost. But it is in such a moment of tranquility in the midst of whispering chaos that the muse of poetry stirs among or within men if we remember Wordsworth now.

The homage to the late Mr. Schiller brought to me the iron resolve to do what I could not have done from the distance that separated me from the motherland. I could not demonstrate with those who took to the streets. I could not burn with those who were burnt alive in Eldoret and Naivasha. I could not do much in the pursuit of social justice from my domicile in distant Europe. But there was one thing I could do. I decided to dedicate my awakening creative talent to the motherland and radically bend my politics of literature in the direction of social justice. I had missed the historic vote as I was preparing for the German language course mid-term examination scheduled for the first week of January, 2008 at the Herder Institute, located on Lumumba Strasse in Leipzig, where, interestingly, the popular Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) presidential candidate Raila Amolo Odinga had also studied in the 1970s. While the world listened to the two main parties and their members/leaders, Party of National Unity (PNU) of Mwai Kibaki and Odinga's ODM, I chose to listen to the voices of the common *mwana*chi, who was caught at the crossfire of the accusations and counter-accusations: the peaceful citizens who had turned on each other and were now pulling their neighbours or innocent Kenyans out of rented houses and public service vehicles before butchering each other mercilessly in the fashion described by Schiller above all in the name of blood gone bad and poll pride.

Kenyan politics is congenitally ethnic. More accurately, for most Kenyans their political identities are their forenames and ethnic identities their surnames. Ethno-political competitions usually descend into conflict at the detriment of nationalism and a sense of collective national identity. It is no wonder that most of the poems in this collection emerge out of a conscious resolve to record memorial events and emotions on the dark page of Kenyan political history between 2007 and today in vivid verse, common codes and familiar forms. This volume also carries poems that deal with other related issues such as the role-place of memory, oral traditions and

temperament in the crafting of aspects of the biography of the poet, his personas and popular figures out of their shared motherland. History and historical events are summoned as background to interpretations of the current angst in the Kenya beyond 2007/8.

Social sarcasm and popular cynicism common in Kenyan public conversations are used to make some of the near-surrealist aspects of our society yield sense to our often baffled minds. The poems, written in the free verse mode, aspire to participate in the enduring public conception in contemporary Kenya that identifies verse as a popular literary form amongst members of our still largely orate societies. I believe the suspicious myth that poetry is a difficult method of communication whispered loudly in Kenyan learning institutions and among Kenyan youth has reached its limits and needs to be contested and debunked, seriously. The myth finds itself on troubled grounds when it comes face to face with the poetic genius of our contemporary (and highly successful as well as popular) oral poets such as Tony Nyadundo, Onyi Papa Jay, Jamnazi Afrika, Shailja Patel, Nonini, Salim Junior, his brother and their peers. It is not poetry that should be taken to the Hague here. No. It is those poets who, in passionate pursuit of the so-called generic conventions and canon, complicate our already complicated lives in Kenya by subjecting our already politically traumatised minds to obscure and often opaque creative works that we ought to take to our hagues of criticism. Ought we not? The language called Life in Kenya and among Kenyans is hard enough a code to crack. Our neo-Machiavellian politics make professors of political science to tread carefully in their learned pursuits of political analyses, interpretations and predictions. Our most original of Kenyan mediums of expression, Sheng', continues to baffle honest sociolinguists and defy academic classification as to whether it is a language, a dialect, a creole, a pidgin, an argot or something as original and unique to the land as the hominid bones unearthed by the Leakeys' out of several stone caves across this ancient land. In

light of all these complexities of life and the paradoxes of Kenyan society, it is necessary to offer readers a break when creating art by trying to save them from further getting lost in the maze of obscure art or archaic conventions. The Kenyan poet who writes today should emulate our poets who sing and perform verse. The writing poet should strive without tire to simplify poetry for the masses and restore written verse as one of the age-old vehicles of public communication and artistic expression that it has always been in societies across Kenya, Africa and the world.

Tony Nyadundo has expanded our appreciation of the marriage institution and its changing challenges in our time. Onyi Papa Jay has broken new grounds by highlighting the beauty that can arise out of inter-ethnic marriage. Jamnazi Afrika have given as an aspect of our own collective character as *Kenyans*, born out of our own social manners, in their two hits *Riziki* and *I am Not Sober*. Shailja Patel continues to help us appreciate the nuances of multiple and diasporic identities with natal roots in Kenya. “Nonini has defined in Sheng”, the soundtrack of my generation’s zeitgeist as did Stevie Wonder define the soundtrack of the youthful years of our blood relative President Barrack Hussein Obama of the United States of America. Franco Luambo Makiadi’s T.P.O.K. Jazz Band and Michael Jackson did the same to Kenyan generations that precede our own; generations born before 1975.. Salim Junior and his elder brother have offered us *Mugiithi* just as they have re-invigorated the powerful poetic traditions of the Gikuyu nation in one of the African languages that have put Kenya on the Atlas of contemporary world literatures courtesy of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, our foremost writer of all times. All these new artists, oral poets, continue to achieve feats of excellence as they edutain Kenyans across political and ethnic divides. Their social and artistic power lies in the language. Their power lies in their ability to use verse as medium and public language that is close to the people. Their work testifies to all and sundry that poetry is not the pariah of Literature as some are wont or would want

us to believe. Poetry is the art of the people. Poetry is the people. Poetry is for the people. Generic conventions, stylistic requirements, metrical traditions and all other facets of verse attain their value from the sensibilities of the people and their social knowledge. What use is writing an exquisite piece of poetry that adheres to all the above as stipulated by books of literary theory and literary criticism for a society that has learned through experience to distrust imposed tradition, draconian conventions and other manifestation of unquestionable authority?

History tells us the definitive moments of an elitist (or elitised) national canon of culture or literature occur almost always when non-conformist artists from the penumbra of tradition join hands with their peers and older iconoclasts and align their collective art, in the name of the people and the land, with the everyday and everyman. Muyaka bin Hajji El Ghassani (1776 - 1840), a contemporary of Goethe and Schiller, and the greatest writing poet that Kenya has ever produced to date, is an apt and enduring example of this argument. His home, old Mombasa, was in a state of war and angst at various moments of his illustrious career as a versesmith in the first half of the tumultuous 19th Century. His forbearers, sages and peers in the business of poetry were still composing, by and large, religious quatrains and such sort of stuff in keeping with the inarguably rich and elaborate craft and canon of Swahili poetry that he was educated in and thrived across the long length of the East African coast long before he was born. But Muyaka was a paragon of social realism.¹ He was a people's poet first before a poet of the poets; a man with his mind and heart aligned with the compass of the everyday his land and times. He took the art-form of Swahili poetry from the hallowed rooms of the perfumed religious and scholarly gatherings of the learned few to the airy streets where poetry has always belonged. The

¹ For more information on the poet and an examination of his poetry and politics consult the brilliant study conducted and published by Mohamed H. Abdulaziz, *Muyaka: 19th Century Swahili Poet*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979.

combative poet knew that the best poetry can do for its people so as to retain its value as an old popular genre of literature and a veritable vehicle of communication among an orate people was to make it mundane and people-centred. Using everyday happenings around him and capturing the overriding zeitgeist as well as temper of the majority of his society at the time of his life, Muyaka, through his poetry and cultural politics gave to us quintessential lessons on the role poets and their works need to play in a society under transition such as Mombasa in the 19th Century. His examples endure in the creative efforts of latter-day iconoclasts who can indeed lay claim to his legacy amongst us. They do not confine themselves to poetry as a genre although the signature of poetry in all the genres they have used to communicate with their fellow citizens is clear. They range from the poets to playwrights and novelists. The work is personified by wordsmiths from Abdilatif Abdalla to Micere Mugo to Tony Mochama, from Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Shailja Patel to M. G. Vassanji, from Joseph Kamaru to Katama Mkangi to Binyavanga Wainaina, from Majorie Oludhe Macgoye to Prechard Pouka to Eric Wainaina, from Kakai Kilonzo to Zuhura Swaleh to Francis Imbuga, from Ejore Ewoi to Dan Owino Misiani to Sitawa the Third Namwalie and all our popular creative artists, whose work in our various vernaculars, national and official languages, have re-affirmed that quests for social justice and harmony can be perpetuated through *a form of artistic expression*, whether oral or written, that is close to the people in terms of language (diction), message (theme) and packaging (form-structure). This *expression* can take the form of a novel, a play, a song (oral poetry) or a written poem, but language and theme should not be sacrificed at the canonical altar of formal traditions and generic conventions so as to appease a few generational guardians of an elitist order located in our academic institutions and mainstream publishing sectors.

Most of the poems in this collection emerge out of a conscious resolve to record popular memorial events and public

emotions on the dark page of Kenyan history between 2007 and today in vivid verse, common codes and familiar forms. The volume also carries poems that deal with other related issues such as the role-place of memory, oral traditions and temperament in the crafting of microcosmic and macrocosmic biographies of the poet, his personas and their shared motherland. Written at a time when the nation was (and still is) astir and restless as a result of incessant bickering among players of the ruling Grand National Coalition (GNC), a union of PNU, ODM and its splinter ODM-Kenya, the poems bear the title “Nest of Stones” inspired by two sources. The first one is a poem entitled “Eastern River” by the late German poet Peter Huchel (1903 -1981) who was born in Lichterfelde, near my office at the Free University of Berlin, where I am currently based. Outside Africa and besides American poetry, Whitman and Ginsberg especially, I, personally, find contemporary German poets such as Huchel, Lisel Mueller and Sarah Kirsch inspirational in many ways. The list is longer inside Africa including among many notables Okot of Uganda, Anyidoho of Ghana, Okigbo of Nigeria, Serote of South Africa, Mapanje of Malawi, Mbizo Chirasha from Zimbabwe, Sitawa Namwalie of Kenya and various Swahili poets.

The second source is a popular proverb among the Fulfude communities of Central and West Africa. These two regions of our beloved continent are home to witnesses who have demonstrated to the world human resilience in the face of strife. The proverb advises: patience can cook a stone or *munyal deefan hayre* in Fulfude. I believe that even eggs of stones can hatch and bring to life a new hope in a land where people do not give up in their struggles for social justice and democracy. Kenya, once the nest of mankind, is one such land. Stones are some of the basic elements necessary for life as we know. Today NASA’s orbiting Kepler Telescope searches the distant realms of our Milky Way for terrestrial or, rather, stone planets. Planets with a solid firmament are a prerequisite for life as we know it, human included. Such a firmament is necessarily made of stone

for it is these stones that break down into soil, which is the quintessential umbilicus that joins us to Life or vice versa. It is also to the same soil that our blood, bodies and bones return after our odysseys between birth and death. Contrary to popular depiction in our modern literature as motifs, symbols or embodiments of death and dissipation, stones are invoked refreshingly throughout this new poetry volume as symbols of stability and urbanity, symbols of tradition and foundation as well as existential life eggs with yolks made out of hope. It is this truth of hope being the fuel of mankind that imbues my craft with that sense of universality. Working in the midst of the wisdom given us by the notable Armenian poet Daniel Varuzhan (1884 - 1915), I aspire towards that ideal where the heart of my poetry identifies with, and emanates from my homeland but its mind or philosophy remains universal.²

Some poems in this collection delve into variations on the themes of war psychology and the psychology of near-civil war or genocidal situations. With the outbreak of violence in a scale unprecedented in the history of Kenyan post-colonial polls, these themes automatically pushed to the forefront of endeavours by various artists dedicated to the capture of that dark mood of the nation for future generations. The media's role in capturing the crisis that engulfed the country was exceptional. Their work remains an archive that salutes both the resilience of the Kenyan people and the goodness of core Kenyan institutions. It is, ironically, the badness of the two that were the object of the media. More than one hundred photos taken by amateur as well as professional photographers offering snapshots on the epoch were placed for the public at the GoDown Arts Center in Nairobi under the theme: KENYA BURNING – Photo Exhibit with the sub-title, a photographic exhibition of the Kenya elections 2007 and post-elections 2008.

² The celebrated poet is also known by his birth name: Varuzhan Chpugkyarian. His advice, extracted from his work, *Namakani* (Letters) published in Yerevan in 1965, is here quoted from *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*. Vol. III. edited by Agop J. Hacikyan, Gabriel Basmajian, Edward S. Franchuk and Nourhan Ouzounian. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. p. 844.

The exhibition was mounted between the 19th of April 2008 and the 10th of May 2008 with the works on display showcasing the amazing talents and artistry of Yasuyoshi Chiba, Allan Gichigi, Georgina Goodwin, Anne Holmes, Maina Kariuki, Charles Kimani, Arno Kopecky, Thomas Mukoya, Boniface Mwangi and Tom Otieno. What these photographers, artists in their own right, have done is remarkable. They have stored our recent past in the language understood most clearly by the memory of people as well as nations: photos. It is the role of the poet to come out strongly as a colleague in this enterprise. Whereas the photographers worked with the material of the moment as it happened, the poet is called upon to exercise poetic justice and imagination unbound in an effort to create photos upon photos for the consumption of his generation and those still to come. Let the deeds of the time and the words that preceded, precipitated, accompanied, limited, militated against, or followed such deeds, all be brought alive in the minds and souls of society that the crimes that were committed against man and society be forever etched in us.³ The artful part of it all lies in listening to both sides of the conflict and telling their stories without bias so that some of the causes, natures and consequences of actions of societies around the country in periods of conflict can become clearer to many in the name of human conscience.

The poems are purposefully expressed in ordinary diction, devoid of obscurity and verbosity but adorned with lyricity and metaphoricity in order to refer and reflect with clarity everyday Kenyan parlance and palaver. Images and

³ I recognise similar efforts that were made by the Generation Kenya project and Concerned Kenyan Writers Collective for re-establishing the power of the pen in the mediation of crises that followed the General Elections of 2007. The efforts of Dr. Wambui Mwangi and Binyavanga Wainaina, who are respectively at the centre of the two initiatives, are saluted. You demonstrated leadership at a time of crises and helped diversify the field of Kenyans from where Kenyan youth can find their role models. When the politicians fail us, let the writers be there for us. It is the least the latter can do. The efforts of the Story Moja initiative mooted around this very time by Sitawa Namwalie, Muthoni Garland, Sunny Bindra, Al Kags and the Ugandan writer Doreen Baingana are also saluted.

emotions that were or might have been afoot across the land in the run up to, during and after the Post-Election Violence (PEV) of 2007-8 are given poetic life and justice in this diction. Figures from the typical Kenyan society such as musicians, misfits, heroes, heroines and even our familiar political “marabouts” are all influences to the literary imagination of the poet, in keeping with African poetical traditions that harvest everyday life as an aesthetic matter beside imagination, myth and memory. This is what lends most of the poems their dramatic quality as well as their narrative potential. In a society whose life is a real film and orality is the background track, a poet observing such a grand show of life finds it almost impossible not to reflect the same in his fictional world or imitate it all at various planes of the aesthetical and ethical, too. The political, social and philosophical arenas in which one can catalogue the poems in this collection reflect this conviction as well as provide the planes at which one can choose to engage if not enter, the everyday worlds of contemporary Kenya.

This contemporary trend of mainstreaming the everyday as an aesthetic of new literary production is what makes me identify myself with other versatile Kenyan writing poets of our generation, such as Philo Ikonya, Shailja Patel, Stephen Derwent Partington, the late Bantu Mwaura, Mukoma Ngugi, Mshai Mwangola, Tony Mochama, Khainga O’Okwemba, Keguro Macharia, Nyambura Githongo, Phyllis Muthoni, Sitawa Namwalie, Grandmaster Masese, Jacob Oketch (b.1977), Muki Garang (b.1978), Omondi Otieno (b.1979), Walter Keyombe (b.1980), Al Kags (b.1980), Njeri Wangari (b.1981), Ngwatilo Mawiyoo (b.1983), Sitawa Wafula (b.1984), who are doing remarkable creative work in their own ways both in and out of the country. Creative idiosyncrasies in the form/format of composition and production of topical themes and issues offer each of these poets their unique poetic-artistic mettle and fibre that the Kenyan public is steadily recognizing and enjoying. Nevertheless, the cross-cutting and enduring power of the “here and now” is as transcendental as it is definitive of the

craft of poetry at the centre of their work when their output is viewed macroscopically as a generational contribution to the long tradition of Kenyan poetry way back through Sam Mbure (b.1950), Jared Angira (b.1947), Abdilatif Abdalla (b.1946), Maina wa Kinyatti (b.1944), Micere Mugo (b.1942), Jonathan Kariara (1935-1993), John Samuel Mbiti (b.1931), Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (b.1928), Mwana Kupona (1790 – 1860) to Muyaka bin Hajji el Ghassani (1776 - 1840), Mwengo bin Athumani (17th - 18th C) and his son Abu Bakari bin Mwengo, and further beyond into our over 40 different affluent ethnic oral traditions.

This offering of poetry entitled *Nest of Stones* is, therefore, an individual as well as generational cogitation on what it means to live in Kenya or to be Kenyan in light of the near past, in our age, to my peers and myself. What is Kenya or who is Kenyan, really? The poems offer a collective and speculative answer but the question will ever remain for you, for them, for others yet to come.

Wanjohi wa Makokha
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Since last year, a number of the poems appearing in this collection, or at least their earlier version, have appeared in various journals both in print and online. They include: ‘A Nation of Advocate’ (*The IUP Journal of Commonwealth Literature*); ‘Anthem of Hunger’, ‘Election Fever’ (now called ‘Opinion Poll Twisty’); ‘Relatives for Hire’, ‘Leadership Styles’ (*Postcolonial Text: Special Issue on East African Literatures and Intellectual Tradition*); ‘Dream Half-Expressed’ (*Journal of New Poetry*); ‘The Last Call’, ‘Return of the Author’ (now called ‘Return of Hope’), ‘Tongues of Flame’ (*African Writing Online*); ‘Haiti: 1 2010’ (*New Contrast*); ‘On His Bed of Fate’ (now ‘Divan of Destiny’) (*Palapala*); ‘Brutus, Fare thee well’ (*Botsotso*) and ‘She’ (*Pulse*). All the journals and their editors are saluted and their effort in making the poems accessible to the world acknowledged. A number of these poems now appear in modified forms in this book.

Finally, a special salute is offered to the Republic of Kenya, its people and leaders in their resolute march towards a better tomorrow on the road of democracy. “I express my gratitude to Professor Francis B. Nyamnjoh and Dr Roselyne Jua of

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Mchongoano:

(Opening the National Name-Calling Ceremony)

The sudden death of a mother is sad,
sadder still is the death of a motherland.

There comes a time when a nation
can be killed by its citizens' ill emotions.
We stand on the cusp of such times now
seeking names for our ill national mood
We shouldn't continue in silence to brood
these unnamed emotions deep within us
that afflict the land we all call mother.

Let us take a stand on the matter
and names of our emotions utter
aloud for all to hear and know
before our broils boil over like boils
and blow in violent viral convulsions
infecting the beloved motherland below
with a terrible nameless illness or sores
that will swiftly bring demise to us all
friends, foreigners, neighbours and foes.

So let us give them names,
these furious flame-like emotions
hidden in our hearts and homes.
Let us call out aloud their names
this very very moment without shame
in our ethnic tongues or even Sheng'
in our political and moral idioms too
thus exorcising ourselves by knowing them.
Shall we?

Let us name them, fellow citizen!
both you and me, fellow citizen!

these things within, fellow citizen!
that stir with hot life, fellow citizen!
and like a ripe ulcer, fellow citizen!
chews awning holes, fellow citizen!
on bonds that bind us, fellow citizen!
to us, and us to the land. (Silence).
Shall we?

Lament of Chetambe

(for the Bukusu freedom fighters of 1895)

Coward Fate stares at us in our eye tonight;
 I see the naked fear in us in its bolder eyes.
 The moonlit silence of the enemy in siege
 Is to us, Were Khakaba, a deafening dirge!
 A herd of hundreds of humped bulls still stands
 between our old Fort and their new Trenches,
 on the soft dewy Bukusu hill grass, untouched
 under the pallid skies of the month of May.
 Hobley's whitemen and men from Wangaland
 know not the old ethics of real war:
 peace offers are equal to a noble surrender,
 so they like puny wily Wangas they are, await still
 the war conch at the sight of the amber sunlight
 to break our world into tiny fragments
 and fill the Nzoia with our arrogant blood.

Kha!

The butchery at Chetambe will bear witness
 to the distant land of the living dead
 as survivors narrate how the white terror of the Maxim
 the rumoured ruthlessness of Banubi mercenaries
 the mercenary Maasai morans, hounds of Nabongo
 the bloodthirsty Kakungulu, hound of Kabaka,
 his uncircumcised warrior-boys from Buganda
 and the rest now formed into an alliance of war
 met a justified death at edge of our swords and tip of spears!

*We say bring the war! Bring the war! Bring it!
 The peaceful sons of the Thigh of the Elephant
 Now in full battle regalia and erection await it!*

*Bring the war not in the redness of a cold dawn
Bring it as you want it, cowards, bring it white!*

They did
We died

But
the memory of our last stand against
the lead and brimstone of the white wars
lives on, on the silent Chetambe stone hills
west of Webuye's Brodericks Falls
and
in the proud mourn
of our blood that survived
we still laugh life when we lament:

*"Khwaswa Khwabuna eee nga lumerera,
wa Chetambe eee nga lumerera eee."*

The Voice of Mvita

I am the blood of Mvita, scarlet insignia of the city of war
 I am the blood that feeds the mighty mind of Ali Mazrui
 that rages in the dramatic diction of his nephew Alamin
 I am the blood that flows in them far from us but for us
 I am the blood that flows in them backwards through Time
 To the loud rebellions of old against the House of Oman
 I am the blood around the Mazruis – free and crimson
 I am the blood in the popular protest poetry of Mvita
 I am the blood of Muyaka son of Haji son of Ghassaniy
 I am his blood in the blood of the poets across the land
 I am the blood that still mocks the weight of Fort Jesus
 I am the blood buried, a cerise curse, under Fort Jesus
 I am the blood spilt by the evil brilliance of João Batisto Cairato
 whose stone handiwork has prevailed in an old race against
 Time
 though it rose out of slow, sweaty, bloody, bitter, black backs
 bent
 sacrificed in bizarre rites of forced masonry to fortify an
 invading race...

See me see it all in the human-shape of the haunted fort
 See me as you see Issa of Heaven – a crucified blood sacrifice!
 Then give testimony to your young bloods, this city's offspring!
 Give testimony from my blood seeds of old to this new breed!
 Give testimony from this greed tale of of bloods spilt
 building Fort Jesus!
 barricading Fort Jesus!
 Sieging Fort Jesus!
 Storming Fort Jesus!
 Sacking Fort Jesus!
 Around Fort Jesus!
 Under Fort Jesus!
 then then

shed
more
blood
no
more
then shed no more young blood
then shed no more new blood....

....for the blood soaked in these Swahili lands
for the blood so soaked in these olden Muslim sands
so fills our splendid orchards of memory and history
with bountiful trees whose burgundy fruits are clots of misery
no more room exists then for newer blood seeds in the
orchards
even those sown either for election 'justice' or ethnic 'cleaning'.

At the Truth and Justice Court Marshall

The mature maize stalk with a golden tuft full, like a fine beret took fullest responsibility for starting the mutiny of the plants.

Then standing at almost two meters, he was a natural leader among the acres of corn arranged in neat rows of army green like a battalion ready to serve in this vast valley now affected not only by tribal chaos after polls but with hunger pangs also.

His noble defense will go down in history as follows:

“Your honour, I am a cereal of the hybrid tribe common in this part and in most counties of Kenya growing corn. To be precise, farmers call us H614D or just sixfourteen.

The evening of the day the law was broken I recall now It was hours after the poll results were finally published I was standing as usual in my hole in the farm of Mr M.

We were waiting for the vote to pass then get harvested but this, as you all know now was not to be, Your honour. Nightfall of the material day brought wild war to our land. The shrieks still ring clearly deep in all pores of my grains. Now as I saw men approaching us some fleeing like arrows some fleeing slower than arrows several arrows hitting them some feeling not, in fact many hiding among us that night.

As I saw all these happening in the blink of a human eye Your honour, that is when I told my clan of corn plants That we cannot wait to be razed to the ground all of us accused of shielding humans fleeing their neighbours. At that critical moment we uprooted ourselves all of us the young ones being helped by the older ones and ran. We did not stop until we arrived at the GoK cereal silos. There is where we were arrested and sold to the millers and now as you are about to sentence me to pap form to be jailed in alimentary prisons of the I. D. P. Camps

*I accept my crime of not shielding those who died there
including the wife of the man who will cook me today.”*

The Qiyama Address to a Talkative Television

The sight of the mayhem that adorns dear Kenya
 Like jewels of evil upon the glistening tiara of a
 Shayṭāni
 Makes my blood inflamed, sears my whole
 mind
 Makes me run run into my mind undressing to
 toes
 Then lifting up my my mighty dong splash the
 land
 With a deluge of cool sperms, cool water of life
 That will cool the tempers of the people,
 leaders
 A drop per each inch of anger that lies
 cultivated
 Now and ready to be harvested by the
 politicians
 So that the silos of cereals across this great
 land
 Shall in future be tourist attractions after the
 war
 Home to skulls of our own home-grown
 genocide
 As have done our tall neighbours the
 Rwandans.

The sight of the mayhem that adorns beloved Kenya
 Like mascara of evil upon the sparkling eyelids of a
 Shayṭāni
 Makes me a devotee of the goddess
 Debauchery
 Fires my insides up the spine up UP the long
 spine!

The sight of the mayhem that adorns darling Kenya
Like lipstick of evil upon the two luscious lips of a
Shayṭāni
Makes me morph into a seed in the scrota of
God
A seed that refuses to wait for the fate it now
has
And itches between His thighs high UP in
heaven
A seed that grows and glows bloating His
scrotum
To the left, His scrotum to the right, finally
all scrota
And as the God now roars like like the
thunder I am

Inside his sack of life, as he roars with irate
libido
Louder than the soaring cries of war across
Kenya
Louder than the national anthem of this great
land
As the God roars with *nyege* his penis now
strong
I I will erupt out of him like a volcano so
majestic
Dwarfing all our volcanic eruptions in Rift
Valley
And as I descend from heaven in spermic
splendor
You shall see me across the dry skies as white
rain
Rain that shall bring new life upon the
motherland
Rain that shall cool the thirst for war among
us all
Rain that shall carry with it the hope for new
grass
Grass that shall grow even before your ox
and theirs
Engage in that fight long told in the Swahili
saying:
*Fahari ware pare wanwiri wakifigana ni nyasi dizi
huumia.*

“In the new craters marking all places where the sperms
splashed,
Progeny of Kenyan centuries shall see hope for the
motherland....”

6

Mirror of Memory

Scarlet light like blood from a bleeding sun dying,
Glow, a liquid mirror overhead, as twilight
returns sense to us
and belching birds of prey catch some rest in the silence of
dusk,
having illustriously played with us their tiny
part of duty.
Now let us unwear all our mangled armament of poll anger
Shake sticky hands and lie our fired hearts
down tonight
side by side in the cooling spirit of the temporary armistice of
today.
Let that phone-call at noon from the White House via Dar es
Salaam echo
Lullabies in our ears outside these ethnic bandanas beside us:
“Peace you shall find after pilgrimage to
your war history.”

At day break and with sleep's innocence bags still under our
eyes,
even before the weaver birds wean or
roosters crow,
we shall wake up and leave our war bodies behind
collecting only our minds and hearts in our
soul sacks
for the epic journey east in search for lessons in history
lessons of our republic in the oral
annals of our biggest war.

Verse reverberates with life even in lands lost in deserts of
cynicism.

that our warmongering minds shall in their out-of-body peace find pieces of the war stories of Kenya.

like the flint-eyed hordes armed for
battle in our own lands.

where thousands of cushitic nomads learnt to dig
on these hectares of sand

as their thousands of herds by force became
fodder that fed fighting forces
of Kenya Army and the Northern Frontier
District Liberation Movement.
adrift above camel trains in cacti-ridden dustlands of Ogaden
and Ajuran, in flashbacks,
we shall see bayonets of rival rifles caressing
breast of wailing womenfolk
before lifting
smiling infants
suckling nipples slit,
placing them gently gently gently
down down to slide down the slippery-red
riverbeds in a belly-twisting battle play.
Their soggy heads smash three by three by three
by....
downstream on rugged granite gabions filled with
scrota of their dads
curses will keep flying out like psychedelic thoughts out
of their still smiling lips
taunting us to join in the strange game and share the delight!

It is the sparkling white explosion of infant heads more than
darkly wails of womenfolk
that will plough into our souls the ugly reality of
the war we want to fight.
It is the crimson visions of seasonal rivers transporting freshly
born blood
that will plant into our souls the reality of of the
war we want to fight.
It is the green of gangrene litres not of army fatigues or jungle
cover
that will manure our souls in the reality of the war
we want to fight.

It is the black wounds still ripe from shifta years on clans which
live here
that will harvest out of our souls a mirror of
memories of wars we have fought.

The facts of our war history now in white, red, green and black
our souls shall return to their bodies elsewhere in
Kenya
bodies that will arise together their mouths singing true
the solemn civic words our national anthem
proclaims.

Wound of Wajir

(after the Wagalla Massacre of 1984)

yes

a mile-long wall of military meshed wire
 a firm wall of long military meshed wire
 around a grove of drying ruby red cactii
 still stands still high out there in wajir;
 almost a quarter a metre or so higher
 is its rusted crest of rusty razor barbs.

on

this wall of rusting army wire,
 history is writ in diagonal squares,
 woven like lines of kiondos,
 row by row into a perimeter parade of eyes,
 watching,
 with a gitmo guard's haunting eyes of stones,
 waiting,
 for the mass grave to resurrect when the last cactus dies.

with

its rusted crest of rusty razor barbs
 almost a quarter a metre or so higher
 still standing still high out there in wajir
 around a grove of drying ruby red cactii
 is a firm wall of long military mesh wire
 a mile long.

here

Where cactii stout are with prime health,
 leaves a lot greener than the rest;
 Where they sway neither to whirlwinds
 nor wailing sandstorms with hails;
 when with metal nails of ritual hoes

on earth's navel Future excises the right holes,
reach she may the Wagalla tablets of skeleton
whereon they lay the history of this wound of wajir.

The Blood-Stone Sequence

a

the bloodstones of hola

Come with me let's face the amber horizon as dawn breaks
Come with me on these camel tracks, feet in our tough *akalas*

Come with me on trails of scorching sands of silence.

Cross the Tana, mind not its mambas or its marvel
Come with me to one source of our restless bloods:
a concentration camp from an era of an empire lost.

Behold at last this quarry by the tall Doum palms
Pick this pebble up or that one by the giant baobab.
Roll it in your palm hold it, feel it, press it, feel it,
this smooth oblong pebble: pure pebble of Hola.

Half a century ago a forgotten hero among others

Here here at Hola held on to it as you do now

And as a new child clutches at nothingness

Or perhaps its destiny in tightened fists

When entering the Earth at time of birth

So did he clutch at it as Death advanced.

Tighter and tighter with each bludgeon!

Tighter and tighter with each bludgeon!

Tighter and tighter with each bludgeon!

Tighter and howling till his fist bled red

Tighter and howling till his fist burst raw

From the batons and boots of colonialism...

His sacrificial blood and that of his new mates

Flee from their burst bitter hearts and into into

These once white pebbles of Hola....overflowing.

.....overflowing soaking the soil cursing it cursing it.

It is the same boiling blood restive in the land

It is the same blood restive in you
It is the same blood restive in me
It is the same blood in us
It is the blood within
It is one blood origin
of the curse blood
in the heart
of our land
our history
our story
our hurt:
Kenyans.

b

maithori ma ithaka na wiyathi

Heavy hammers rise rise come down hard
As bleeding sun rises above us squatting.
The hammer rises and comes down hard
Sometimes competing with a rhino whip
When the sun has fiercely risen above us
hammers rising-falling weakly off tune.

But still

*We hum of the thirst in distant Abyssinia
Where we bore armament for the ingrate.*

mmmmmm

The granite cracks not as heat hits Hola
Boiling liquid stamina off the hammers.
The granite stands and so the whip falls
Letting hammers crush on thumb stubs
Painting lines crimson in the grey stones
Lines red, long like light off a dying sun.

But still

*We hum of Kohima, Imphal and yonder Burma
Dead kinship we found by her waters of Chindwin
mmmmmm*

The crowd of thumbs in our wire camp
Continues to lose its numbers each day
Soon there will be no thumbs with us
Soon there will be only fingers with us
Soon there will be just a camp of fingers
But each night as usual all will *bao* play.

*But still
We hum on in grit onwards without end
from Hola to Mageta to Manyani to beyond.
mmmmmmmmmm*

***c
lost requiem of general russia***

The night before the last,
no cricket a single note chirped
as do crickets here on usual nights.
No breeze a single tune whistled. None.
Behind the urinal spot in this fig grove,
not a shy crescent or a twinkling star afar
peeped down at him from Night's blanket edge.
The prison in slumber had become one huge coffin
buried under a still dome of the deepest darkness.

The next night, night of his burial,
12 random slum and suburb curs
howled 21 stanzas to the eerie sky
as the falter-faltering footfalls
of their masters, homeward-bound drunks,
mixed with their bawdiest vernacular ballads
to bid him his very final elegiac farewell,

well past midnight when the hooded undertaker
had planted his corpse, secretly, like a seed of sin,
in an anonymous hole of black gravel behind the cells asleep.

Enkapune ya Muto

Bloods of our land, I salute you as ink of this poem:
 I am the blood of an older you deeper inside of you,
 the invisible presence that is a tenant in your sour souls.
 I am the blood bridging you to them to lands around you
 I am the blood of the nameless women of Great Rift Valley
 Who sat on mats of ochre grotto dust at Enkapune ya Muto
 hummed lullabies in tongues still alive among you
 Made lilac love to warrior-herder-husbands at dusk
 Sunset rays reflecting on sweat gleaming on our backs
 Before making beads of perforated ostrich egg shells
 To convey the love we had for life and this old land
 Behold this Twilight Cave on the Mau Escarpment
 Behold its face facing Koobi Fora and Oloorgesailie
 Behold all these and the other Rift Caves or cradles,
 Behold how our fine line beads scattered, map them all!
 Behold also our Acheulean quartzite or obsidian crafts
 For here in it lies the memory of a parent bloodline
 That feeds many of your own bloods
 That feeds the arteries of your hearts
 foe and friend alike
 now at arms around me.

10
Illeret

Come
Trek with me to the distant plains of our outlying North
Come with me on these time-trampled cattle tracks
Come with me in the twilight of your tempers
Come with me to the vast plains of Time in Illeret
Let me show you a reason, a source, of amity.

Behold
the Borana zebu herds, dancing twilight silhouettes
Behold the horns of the lead borana bull in the kraal at Sibilo!
Behold the dewlap of that one....
Behold the hump of this one...
Behold the tail of...
Behold the....
etc.

Behold!
Reminded you are of hundreds of Pokot herds
we just passed at Lomut. Aren't you?
Reminded you are of hundreds of Marakwet herds
we just passed at Lomelo, Aren't you?
Reminded you are of hundreds of Turkana herds
we just passed at Lotongot. Aren't you ?
Reminded you are of hundreds of Samburu herds
we just passed across these lands of the Loikip. Aren't you ?
Reminded aren't you of hundreds upon hundreds
of zebras dotting plains between old Turkwell and the mounts
of Ndoto?
Reminded you are of hundreds upon hundreds
of boranas dotting the dusty desolation miles around
Loiyangalani?
Are you not?
Are you not?

Are you not?

And

As one plods ever north ever northerly
towards lands around the largest permanent desert lake
in the whole world – the jade-coloured Lake Turkana,
sameness becomes as normal as oxygen we breath.
The stock look the same the earth looks the same
The herds look the same the sky too is the same.

Now

, then, behold with me what lies before you
Now that we are here on the hallowed land of Illeret.
Enchanted don't be by the beauty of oryxes, topis and gerenuks
standing under this low sky like the salt pillars we just passed.
Be distracted not also by the tiny tourist Cessna taking off
Like an African buzzard after a fish raid in the Jade Sea.

Come now,

tell me, is this here not the footprint of a god?
Behold this footprint of an ancient common ancestor¹
whose teeming offspring live in old illeret and lands yonder.
Behold this antique footprint of Man step with me into the
stone of our History...

So

when our peoples of the North, co-offspring of old Illeret
Point their souls towards internecine rivalry and AK 47s
At each other; at each other's homes, herds, heads, hearts,
When these tall arid warriors north in the Rift Valley
Plunder and pillage herds that look like their own
Plunder with spillage of blood as red as their own
They forget that the footprint of god in old Illeret
looks not unlike their own too though a little larger
they forget that the brave black faces of their foes

¹ There are several footprints of early primates (*Homo erectus*) found at Sibiloi National Park in Northern region of the Rift Valley Province in Kenya.

look so much like their own, only darker or rounder
they forget that the sky-shattering shriek of their victims
looks so much like their own, only louder or longer
they forget that the wounds of their captives
look so much like their own, only....
they forget...only...they forget....only...

Or

perhaps they forget not
perhaps they care not
perhaps they feel not
perhaps they see not

But

in the holy land of the birth of our blood at Illeret
where the plains people of the great North Rift
herd their hundreds of herds and raise their own
footprint of a common god defies Time defies Man
to whisper without words that the bloods are same
to whisper into our memory that our blood is one
to testify to us in engraved stones for all to see
that we are all one and came down from Them.

11
KORE

I am the exiled Masai blood flowing in the Kore of Lamu
cut me and smell the old Ilaikipiak cattle blood still in me
smell it and encounter the spirits of Maa that bound me:
memories of our defeat by Purko in the pogroms of old
the pogroms that led us away from our lands of grass
lands behind the river of reptiles into unknown east
east into the hands of certain sly slaving Soomalis
from whence finally into the isles of Lamu
we found this exile that is now home
after the mercy of Heaven
and the amity of Lamu.
smell the blood. spell it
K. O. R. E.
Know me,
Kenyans
Know
war.

27

13
last supper

i am the voice that still stirs like an apparition in a cemetery of
dreams,
at the edge of this city of dust, heart of this vast valley of ethnic
rifts;

the voice that speaks to you, you and you in the idiom of
conscience.

i am the voteless voice of the blood of one who death took at
puberty,
the teen burnt between hate explosion after friction of foe
ethnicity

then hidden as a cat hides its shit in this sirikwa hole at hyrax
hill.

i will remain here trapped in mystery like my new hole home
or like the Menengai voices of victims of civil wars of Maa
long after echoes of arrows' whizzing, pangas clanging
have reached the horizon of your national memory
long long after death packs up and leaves
long long after this violent vote is history.

Inviolable in my hole of hidden misery
fwaakafwaka! I eat kilos of roast me
my own motherland has served me
as supper, my skull being the bowl
my backbone, a fine strong ladle.

14
retribution

Mine is the skeleton bleaching in the low equator sun.
Like a broken web the spider that is my soul
long abandoned its existence in this dead, naked abode.
Wheat stout with golden health offer me cover
now
after drinking litres of my young blood, fatty flesh pounds
from the corpse that was until recently voter
number 21666xx.

Mine is the skeleton bleaching in the low equator sun
clattering without care under gnarled talons of
obese crows
hoping off the roadside row of eucalyptus, sometimes,
to peck-peck at the militant black safari ants still
carving me
or rather the residues of that lost flesh cover of mine.
Aisee! That my one fine ebony body that finally
betrayed me.

My soul is a lone refugee its former home now another ruin.
Having wrestled with Tribalism and lost, narrowly,
haunt it does now the eerily silent nights of
this dry prairie
storming mosttimes in screams, the guilty minds asleep
in narrow triumph across the new murrum
road border,
Me, the rancorous guffawing ogre in their
never-ending nightmares.

15

Communion of Stones

i am the blood of olden people of stone at ancient
namoratunga²
between the dust plains of lodwar and the horizon at kalokol.
i am the blood stored in these 19 stones standing under our
northern skies;
the blood that makes them one as they face the seven sisters
high up
A stonehengean monument to memory stored in sacred stone
for you and me when the era
of forgetting upon us dawns
as it appears to have
done
now

·
Behold!
a stone here chants to triangulum
another stone to pleiades.
a stones there chants to bellatrix
another stone to aldebaran.
a stone here chants to central orion
another stone to saiph.
a stone there chants so serious to sirius....

Nineteen!
tall male basalt pillars in all,
like totems of an ancestor clan,
align with the sister star systems
high in the heavens above
in their celestial march
through the great dales and velds of time.

² The first recorded archaeo-astronomical site in sub-saharan Africa. It is from the megalithic age and is found in Northern Kenya at the Kalokol region near Lake Turkana. It is also called „Dancing Stones of Namoratunga“.

Behold!
these olden bloodline of old namoratunga
today aflow in various veins
of the bloodlines of our vast homeland
binding us to each other and all to the land
from the cushites east to bantus west
from the river-lake nilotes south to the plain nilotes north
of the Great Rift Valley

So my kin!
why these new blood rifts?
why widen our valley with new native chants?
evil chants hell bent to scatter you and me
from escarpments east to woodlands west
from vast meadows south to sand savannahs north;
chants in broken idioms honouring the ethnicity of death
chants breaking our communion of bloods across great Rift
Valley
ear-splitting chants that turn our florid life dance off the tune of
heaven and earth?!

Communion of Bloods

rumours of civil strife and arms race reaching us
ride on the waters of the mighty Tana from distant troubled
hinterlands.

the republic they say is rife with electoral tension between
ethnic nations there
that will explode in a big bloody bomb wiping all into the wide
ocean around us.
therefore kins of hinterland come with me to this tiny corner of
our republic.

Ignore the stacatto AK47 chats of the opiate Al Shabaab.

Shriek of the children of Somalia drowning in kin blood
That too ignore, as you must ignore the din of blood-cleaning
markets:

From sun-burnt sandfarms of Darfuri Sudan
to the vast lush savannah of Oromo Ethiopia,
from bleeding rape valleys of Eastern Congo
to such brutal somewheres in Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda.
Ignore them all as a neighbour at times ignores warring families
next door
in order to find or negotiate peace in his house staring at strife
at its door.

Now come with me to the Lamu Archipelago down South
Re-learn from tiny isles about the communion of bloods.

hear the call of your hybrid blood under the mangroves
that still grows on these tiny isles of the mangroves
that sweated in slavery amongst these mangroves
that harvested its life like you did from lands afar.

Behold the zinc hue on the Persian ruins of my past
Behold the walls of coral like some in yonder Mumbai.
Behold Faza whispering of the Turk legend Mir Ali Bey
Behold Oman in Pate and its poetry in *Utendi wa Tambuka*

Behold Siyu sing its blood bond with distant Ming Dynasty
Behold these symbols of my blood hybrid, monuments to our
Time past.
be with peace knowing your bloods flowing strong and steady
like old Tana,
this same Tana winding from your lands in there making you
one with us here,
are of old and long too but still hybrids of lands elsewhere.
Explode then not in the name of purity.

Anthems of Stone

there is no place you can stand your feet
 on the loamy soil of the vast home district
 without view of magnificent Mount Elgon.
 whether standing behind Kapsokwony kiosks
 urinating pints of refuse after an illicit binge
 or chewing stolen sugar cane at Cheptais;
 you may be weeding acres of Kopsiro corn
 or watering the herd on the banks of Nzoia;
 a child chasing fowl from a sunflower farm
 in Kaptama or kins of Chebyuk clans at war
 all behold the Mountain and its stony tower.
 it is rumoured that old curses lie under rocks
 of the highest peak awaiting new provocation.

it is on the lush slopes of this Mount of God
 that new songs of affliction sear the nights.
 the bull frogs of the malarial swamps croak
 not to their reluctant mates but to the sky.
 the swamps are now smelling of dead blood
 so strong is the smell that it kills sex mood
 among entire frog clans miles without end.
 bull cows too low so low like castrated oxen
 with null sense of mischief or iota of bravado
 in their calls to their strangely silent heifers.
 the roosters now crow only in the daylight
 as songs of sedition take over village nights.

it all started with the arrival at old Kapkoto
 of the state men of war and their G.K. guns.
 the hunts for a rebel youth and his nasty guns
 has now sown seeds of blood across the land
 and now the district sings new songs of agony
 as mounds of farm grass give way to skeletons

some with smashed skulls others without theirs
and yet others with ribs missing here and there.
wells bear an ill smell from mangled male flesh.
wherever you lift your nostrils for air it is there:
rancid smell of death amix with grass and red loam.

the songs have no rhythm and reveal no rhymes
they rely more on mimicry in their communication.
steady staccato of AK47s chattering about death
resemble the melodies of these new village songs.
the crrrunch of bones crushing under army boots
bear an uncanny similarity to these new choruses.
this dance style too is a masterful piece of mimicry.
tens of thousands of male villagers from miles around
in a prohibited ornate orgy, smash their genitalia
on garthered shrapnel of bullets from the operation
their tearless marble eyes riveted on Mountain Elgon.
as they scream in unison wildly the vernacular climax
oxygen mixed with hot sweat spreads across the land.

the womenfolk hide in the lantana bush nearby
not allowed in the midst of this new male dance
and attempt with ears only their loves to identify.
mouths of children are stuffed with maize cobs
and their cowardly buttocks tied with sisal cords
that no noise whether oral or anal may escape
from them and give away the female hideaways.
this is the new native song and dance in fashion
given to the citizens of the afflicted Elgon lands
by sons of the soil and the fathers of the nation.
and as the poet sits now under a canopy of pain
finding the exact diction for the radical orature
his eyes on distant Elgon murmur curses of stone.

18
kali yuga

Am ok. Am amok. am ok. am amok. am ok. Amok. ok
A stone here. A stone
there. A stone here. A stone there.
I will arrive finally at the doum palm oasis of coy Kalacha
Here the temptation will
return as I deep mysoul in water
Visions of the graceful
Gabbra maiden walking with gait
that can make
reticulated she-Giraffes masturbate in envy
tempting me to
forgive you and forever rest in this peace.
But I like Jesus of
Heaven will find no ears for temptor noise
I will keep on with the stone-amassing task here as well
A stone here. A
stone there. A stone here. A stone there .
All stored carefully in my never heavy sack of stones.

Am ok. Am
amok. am ok. am amok. am ok. Amok. ok
A stone here. A stone. there. A stone here. A stone there.
I will enter the Desert of Chalbi my
sack stone weight on me
Walk three times around the 100,000sq km of flat parched sand.
I will then jog backwards three
times taunting the love-starved army recruits
Who I witness seducing dainty Rendille damsels and shooting
themselves.
I will jog-jog on the walls of
Chalbi's screechiming sand whirlwinds
Letting my mind be dust tossed here-here and here-there-here

Letting my mind to be screwed there and there. Then here.
Then totally.

As my tongue picks up pebbles
picked by this ibilisi sandwind
pick-picking them up as does a god
for pleasure human souls
A stone here. A stone there. A stone here. A stone there .
All stored carefully in my never heavy
sack of stones.

Am ok. Am amok. am ok. am amok. am ok. Amok. ok
A stone here. A stone. there. A stone here. A stone there.
I will climb by a steady jog all the metres to Lenana's
peak.
The valleys below clad in hallucinatory trees speaking in mystery
like the steep stone slopes calling me loud to their strange
refuge
will all warn me of the dangers that lie in this green evil Mount.
Oonoonoononwards I will keep jogging and like the Samburu
warrior
at the rustlers' hide-out forty miles out in Elgerei in the Milgis
Lugga
who gave me the blood of a stolen bull mysoul to quench,
I will laugh at these voices of Fear abiding in this old Lenana's
peak
as i settle on this rock peak, roof of Kenya to uproot cowardice
stones with my toes
singing for stamina, loud copulation songs to the spirit of
Mekatilili wa Menza.
A stone here. A stone there. A stone here. A stone. there.
All stored carefully in my never heavy sack of stones.

(Author Advice: the rest of the stanzas are in whispers)

i am ok. i am amok. i am ok. i amok am. ok i am. Ok!

a stone here.

another there. and there. and there!

a stone here. another there. and there. and here!

a stone south. a stone west. a stone east. a stone north!

i will keep on collecting them long after i escape the cynicism

you have consigned me to!

and the explosion of teargas blinding me within has subsided

long long long after your siege of my

dreams! long long long after!

you buried a bullet in me here, another

here and here!

by split a head here, another there and

there!

by crushed a cunt here, an arse there, a

mouth, a law, a dream, a life!

eeiiish! my friend!!!

i will keep on collecting these stones of granite!

tell them! *ni waigwa?*!

in the land of the dead where you have exiled me!

tell them! *woyee!*

on the dawn of the day of qiyamma I will wear my armor!

tell them! *wololo yaye!*

of granite as black as your heart and mind crimes!

tell them! *kaleiyi!*

and calling on the names of Jehovah, Shiva and Allah!

tell them! *aisee!*

i will ask that a duel new and just, be given us!

just us! see bow yes! hia! and rows of you!

that i may finish with you what you started!

i go won yu naw mabrodde o!!

Haaiyah!

KALI YUGA!

Dreams Half-Expressed

*They whisper in shouts of why,
the tearful voices that recite
this poem to me.*

They tell of hidden hillocks,
brain-stained, crusty skulls;
heaps of bloody and rusty
arrow-heads, and machetes;
piles of pounded incisors,
tobacco white once,
now humus of hue;
strewn evidence of
humanimity,
debris from halved
dreams of democracy.

*They whisper in screams of why,
these tearful voices that narrate
this pogrom in me.*

Their tale lies unburied now,
under tidy rows upon rows
of lowly loam farm mounds,
crowned with dry wreaths
of budding black jack weeds,
and grinning couch grass.
Hear them whisper without end
in the misty swirling womb
of this national elegy,
true voices of a dream half-expressed.

Tongues of Flame

from our tongues of flame
the heat of tribal tempers
grow as do from embers,
tiny sparks of orange furies.

from our tongues of flame
tempers become liquid words
words that turn gaseous later
and fuse with oxygen all around.

from our tongues of flame
this portent oxygen stirs
a red, green, white and black
explosion of furious nations

that diffuses swiftly like eruption of toxic
gaseous lava from old Ol Donyo Lengai,
who awaken from slumber poisoned by tribalism,
eats us all as we do our own down tongues full of blame.

Call to Manhood and Arms

The whistle wails as air splits
and waves of its sound sail
well across dawn distances
as blood-coated ritual blades
slice away the childish bonds
that bind the boy to his past.

Behold now a fine young man
in erection like the penis of a god
facing northwards afar to the Nile
along which his ancient fathers
trekked across time and space
to inhabit this ancestral lands,
home to the west Kenyan lineage.

The darkening drops of blood
dripping into a puddle of genes
seeping into skins of thirsty earth
to join with mature human humus
made from several ancestral seeds of
bodies buried that bore his bloodlines,
from distant lands of yester-centuries
to bring this youth to its own destiny,
offering it the mandates of manhood.

Since the era bygone of the legend
Mango, slayer of the serpent,
who rid the tribe this ogre of old
and called across ridge and age
boys of Bukusu to slice in silence,
in union with Nandi and Maasai,
their foreskins

that demarcate
the boundaries of a childhood
and manhood,
behold the ultimate
honour to him and thirsty forefathers:
litres of pure, penile blood in Augusts of leap years!

With that whistle, gone with winds
are the rhythms of infancy and fears
gone darkness that crowded in hearts
filled with ogre stories and admonition
whenever our acts off frivolous emotion
vexed adults' expectations of earnestness.
In the new silence stands now in majesty
a marvel of culture: a new personality
forged in the deep midst of a ritual climax
where black mystery mixes with oral history
to create another likely armour of ethnicity.

The Last Call

Bring brinng!
Bring brinng!
Bring brinng!
Brin!

(silence)

At last out of battery breath, at the end of last pant
between these dewy pink papyrus swamp reeds
beyond where Nyanza frogs in silence grieve,
below the lonesome moon burying its sobs
in the trembling blanket of nimbus clouds,
a lonely, tatty Nokia 6020 abruptly died...
three feet away from where life lay dead
on a crimson shroud of liquid tribal hate.

(minutes of silence)

Anthem of Hunger

Whenever clocks in the lost lands strike midday,
the noons boil over into the heat of the work day,
then tremulous tunes across the land arise
from deep within many a potly belly.

The tunes start off distant and doleful
like thunders in diminuendo across lands at the equator
then climax in a grand grumbling crescendo
like a thousand funerary drums under thundering thuds.

Then is when the multitudinous pair of parched lips
split into gaping yawns to sing without words
the one minute chorus in the anthem of hunger
composed inside the voicy bowels of various pot bellies.

Season of Reason

(shout)

kondele Kondele KONDELE!

You too have now erupted from your election energy
Like a G.K. condom that withstand couldn't, the heat of the
moment

Seeds of life now turning to sperms of discord, death,
destruction, dirge
As hordes pour off your lawless lanes chant sedition hands
turned to catapults, mouths to Maxims!

obunga Obunga OBUNGA!

H.I.V-irritated teen mothers undress in memory of pre-
menstruation majesty
Spreading like obambala in a human road-block across the length
of Kenyatta Street
Recalling years before of innocence stolen, blessing ecstatically
in ululation this season of anomy
Ignoring their wares being looted in the steady squalls of saline
tear-gas and totitotiti! sirens of Law!

manyatta Manyatta MANYATTA!

We have heard the whizz of your *boda boda* tires
from our surburbia of emotion neighbouring your irate hearts
Relent then in your supply of rioters to the battle streets of your
city
That which took a century to build should not be in ruins after
anger pangs!

nyalenda Nyalenda NYALENDA!

The hounds that howl hunger near your famous beer parlours
Now sing the national anthem as you stagger singing elegies of
K. P. U.

decades of decadence taunt you too with citations from the
sermons of Okullu,
mimicked artfully in the eloquent voice of Ouko, to march in
dissidence on distant Nairobi!

nyamasaria Nyamasaria NYAMASARIA!
Your name rolls of the tongue of memory like tremulous tunes
of Legio Maria
But your hardcore daughters immaculate in their graduate
gowns from the school of life
Suspend their degrees on Kama Sutra to amass armament of
rotten eggs and tomatoes from Kibuye
Their children cheering loud as shrapnel of real bullets pierce
the naked buttocks of racing *matatus*!

kodiaga Kodiaga KODIAGA!
I hear your voice from those cubes of penitential confinement
Summoning legendary Lwanda Magere from his long slumber
in stone
With chimes of Tricycle padlocks on iron gates restraining you
from joining others
Armed with ancient stones each torn off Thimlich Ohinga with
nine nails red, one indigo!

(whisper)
*Offspring of Jaluo we know we all know we know
that the waters in your eyes are now bitter.
So you can listen to my following address
Though it is your mother now I address:*

(shout)

“FLORENCE KISUMU, MIKAYI OF JALUO!

Look at thick plumes of smoke rising, your war headscarf
Adorning your head like a black-bleached beaded scalp cap of
Jaramogi

FLORENCE KISUMU, CITY OF JALUO!

Look at the thick stench of burnt tires and teeth
Replacing the fragrance of fish under your sexy lingerie of heat

FLORENCE KISUMU, MIKAYI OF JALUO!

Look at the parade of penises, which are looting fisherhands
Caressing by force the pleasurable insides of Indian
supermarkets

FLORENCE KISUMU, CITY OF JALUO!

Look at the red hyacinth of Winam Gulf now stout with health
Marching overland with your under-armed youth on the war
path

FLORENCE KISUMU, MIKAYI OF JALUO!

Look at the fishy images of yourself on national television
Your face now painted orange with legal and illegal firepower
flames

FLORENCE KISUMU, CITY OF JALUO!

Look at me looking at you not blaming you but talking to you:
when one is a centennial, combat is one forbidden form of
expression.”

Portrait of the Citizen as an Exile

she stood penciled
 on this fresh page of
 pain in the book
 of life as her tears
 watery mascara stains
 flushed into oblivion
 like her first femcondom
 down this casino toilet.
 silence.

she stood so still in
 heels steel of hue
 cushite eyes in aloe
 holding her new life
 far from old Moqadicio
 as she did her
 eye pencil -
 weakly.
 silence.

she stood still as
 a splintered mirror and
 walls of streetwise graffiti
 hugged her tight until
 all her muslim hope was
 out out and she knew
 it was time a new
 fake infidel to draw
 of herself.
 again.
 silence.

Government Eviction

(incantation with jingle accompaniments)

*!....fishes that swim in grass
and songs that sing themselves
and things that have no names
and words that hide meanings
and owls that hesitate to fly
and ants that evolve into us
and plastic that taste like soil
and colours that eyes see not
and walls that surround null
and streets that end nowhere
and snails that bathe in salts
and knees that refuse to fold
and hands that stick together
and gods that enjoy boredom
and rapists that are impotent
and tears that boil like magma
and hair that fly off the head
and teeth that grow and grow
and thoughts that ask and ask....!*

And then there was life in stones
when they finally reached a cave
at the end of the steepest climb
and the climax of a hollow liturgy.
The stones stood there in a circle
capering as they swayed sideways
six priests that is, each now a stone.
two steps to the left a gentle. stop

entering the Void

two steps to the right and a stop

backward-backward

in a sweaty trance dance.

It is on this summit of sandstones
towering like a god across the land
high above the vast veld all around
high past Verreux's eagle-owls nests
high up above dense bamboo thicket
alive with tribal mysteries so ancient
where the heart of this water deity
rests together with the ritual basin
whose powderish freight symbolise
the first sacrifice that bound us all
to each other and to this very land.

But now that the decree is declared
and the whole nation stands against
all that holds us to this water tower
now that the stones are in a circle
as they were at the start of history
and the priests sing of end of times,
now that the covenant between us
and this beloved land is dying on us,
driving our progeny to mendicancy,
we mourn within for it will never be
the same again: not between us or
between our tribe and this republic.

Let Their Conscience Crack

Their conscience will crack at last aisee!

as the spirits of that fatal
moment
when those citizens were
roasted
turn into the chronic
nightmares
that will haunt each one of
them
to the third and fourth
generation
down their innocent family
lines.

Their conscience will crack at last aisee!

when the loads of choke and wails
solidify into a stone around necks
of their fate and that of their kids
and progeny who though unborn
will wear this necklace of affliction
for hate crime of their forebearers.

Their conscience will crack at last aisee!

when elaborate rites
and taboos
have been concluded
on the fates
of their zealots and
heterotophs

of unknown names are
released
before thousands at
Uhuru Park
after being cursed in
their names.

Their conscience will crack at last aisee!

these men whose words and deeds
led to the butcher of innocent kids
and elderly citizens on wheelchairs
before their bodies were set ablaze
between several benches of a
church
in atonement for a semi-stolen
election.

Their conscience will crack at last
aiseEEE!

these stolids and their
own unborn,
when the wailers at
Heaven's gate
finally finish the long
lamentation
of their own death
amidst friends
occasioned by the
crime of politics
and ethnic difference
rife among us.

Waiting for Mr Law

In the land of K
where everybody but
the present president
has literacy in the loud art
of making all sorts of noise,
through all available orifices
on the streets and in offices,
at work, home, sacred places,
in schools, malls or cemeteries,
noise is the language of choice.

In this lively language they all thrive
until time comes when uttering a name
brings them all so close to their leader
and silence becomes the lot of the land.
The name is: Mr. Law from Den Haag!

Bickering, the national entertainment,
ends abruptly and silence reigns
at the mention of the foreign yet
familiar sounding name of one
The Hon. Mr. Law from I. C. C.

Yes. In this famous land of noise
where a shunned discipline silence is
and men, women, kids all excel
in national noise-making as a cool
hobby and profession, all go silent
when you say, "Shh!" (finger on lips)
"Here come Mr Law from Den Haag!"

Brideprice of Tears

The political coalition in my motherland
reminds me of bride price paid in tears,
the one that Nyanza maestro mentions
in a sweet song on passions of divorce.
i want to imagine that the tears of 1333
citizens who died in the 2007-8 anarchy
have united drop after drop into nimbus
of the darkest kind and as the matrimony
of utter convenience between the P and PM
continues to stir like the Nyanza under a storm,
mirth, misery and acrimony reign in the country.

Where Democracy Rests Peacefully is Here....

Hopping from one cloud after another and another etc

Sometimes in backwards

somersaults

Like an overzealous airforce recruit

Sometimes cartwheeling then ending in hops

Like a teen baboon erupting out of
abstinence

Sometimes doing those tallish

Maasai jump ups

Up! Hop! Step! Cartwheel! Etc etc etc!

OK!

In short, **locomoting** (somehow) on clouds
Across the vast space of my motherland
I turn indigo, scarlet, pink then emerald
Each hue a stanza of an unwritten poem
Running away from my mind playfully
This is the new busy of the tired poet
And as I hop on my broken toe stubs
I mourn my nails that now lie behind
Me like footprints on each single cloud
I have so far covered in this long chase
After the poem that does not want to be.

Suddenly, and with military accuracy,

I turn into the poem itself, my head

The title, body the two stanzas here

And blood a reflection of 10 rainbows

On the blue sky that turns into paper

Enabling me to lie my new identity

On it and be read from the republic

Miles below me, lower than vultures

Stopping in mid air admiring new me

Miles many miles lower down under
Where the president and his cabinet
Lead the nation in craning black necks
Squinting eyes to read me: DEM-what?

D. e. m. o. c. r. a. z. y: DEMOCRACY!

“no No NO!” Shouts the bald Great Leader

Eyeing his head of the National Reading

Commission on Sky Mystery (NRCSM).

“Read AGAIN!” this irate Commander in Chief

shouts a national order to all 40 million souls

across the whole vast republic at the equator!

Craning necks, heads ballooning

with echoes of the order,

the 40 million in unison read me:

D.

E...?

.....

D.

E. M. O. C....

R. A. C. Y:

DEMOCRACY!

(poet's advice: reader whisper these words now ☺)

(the tune of the national anthem begins as birds, beasts and trees

join the 40 million and their C-in-C in a ndombolo jamboree

at this new national success against this new security mystery)

31
Ethnicinsanity

perhaps it is the vultures with wet beards:
the vulture tribe called the Lammergeiers
from the rugged escarpments west

or

cool crows with neckties dipped in dry blood....
From the lawless lanes in certain city corners
Perhaps it is the fine falcon clan or kestrels

or

the stronger carnivores – eagles or hawks
both from bomas that dot the width of the land
perhaps it is dainty doves from eaves of chapels
that line the long length of our famed coastal strip
or even eleven owls only that'll disobey Night's curfew

to

convene the last dinner in Kenyan history
when we all lie slaughtered on each dry inch
of our own land and the world whispers wild
about self-genocide and quarantines our land,
declaring our dead republic, a regional cemetery.

or

perhaps it is rows of incisors of our own ethnicinsanity
which
will.

Lines of the Country Within

*“O God of all creation,
Bless this our land and nation.
Justice be our shield and defender,
May we dwell in unity,
Peace and liberty.
Plenty be found within our borders.”*

*“Let one and all arise
With hearts both strong and true.
Service be our earnest endeavour,
And our Homeland of Kenya,
Heritage of splendour,
Firm may we stand to defend.”*

*“Let all with one accord
In common bond united,
Build this our nation together,
And the glory of Kenya,
The fruit of our labour
Fill every heart with thanksgiving.”³*

(a half minute of silence)

³ In italics, the Kenyan National Anthem (English version). A version exists in Kiswahili, the national language.

Father of the Nation

The mausoleum is your final abode

The place where your memory stays alive.

In my blindness occasioned by your absence,

near you now on a stone, a curfew on at Uhuru Park

let your memory shine on me as darkness the land stalks

Stalks not only State House but also the houses nationwide.

Sit with me still staring at the blank folio of this moonless sky

Allow yourself to leave your mausoleum contort into the map

Of this land then cover me warm and heat my poetic soul like a
lover

Be one with me sing harambee make me know how to write
three new stanzas

that will paint in inks of poetry or patriotism

the arcadia bespoken in our national anthem:

a poem that will consult spirits of those poets

whose work wished for justice, peace, liberty

in a kenya of their age and consecutive kenyans,

a poem that will let these spirits and our own

arise and defend the land against endeavours

of a few but formidable kenyans whose politics

plays chess with our future and ethnic heritage

a poem that will be a spirit itself like Harambee

binding us all as has Annan's National Accord

into one national force, which like the words

of the three stanzas of the national anthem,

gives the heart of the land lines of fresh hope.

Opinion Polls Twisty

my fellow national
 your mind and mine clench
 into a furious feast of emotion,
 each moment of our Election.
 fears once goliathly small,
 now grow nearly david tall,
 as our press opinion polls
 become all-consuming balls
 in which our minds entangle,
 in a breath-taking ethnic tango
 on the slippery stone floor of
 our minds awake to poll pleasure,
 then untangle in a steady boogie of twist,
 twisty-twisting till we twist ourselves!
 twisty-twisting till we twist ourselves!
 twisty-twisting till we twist ourselves!
 into the steel-tight national noose
 that always
 hangs you and me
 wrungs your kin and mine
 and among our offspring sets free finally
 eloquent ethnic elegies and an era of fratricidal frenzy .

Elegy of Escapees from the East⁴

(for our people in Kiryandongo Refugee Camp in Uganda)

*we have been set wandering
wandering in wailing lines
across soils of foreign lands*

bearing bundles of new memories
on bent backs of our brave infants
we now cross shadows with Elgon,
racing west to the sun to rise with it
throngfuls of female farm and slum
escapees fleeing new poll storms,
our unplanned flight inspired by
fears and scares of fiercer attacks
from our very own fellow citizens
now that poll marriages are sour
in this our land of political unions.

*we have been set wandering
wandering in wailing lines
across soils of foreign lands
tell Mengo and tell Nakasero
by the Justice of God we say
this lament is truly a plea
let them ask not for our heads
let them ask not for passports.*

we have been set wandering
with baskets of new placentas

⁴ In the 19th Century and centuries earlier, it was illegal by Bagandan laws designed at Mengo, seat of the Kabaka to enter Uganda from the east. Anglican Bishop James Hannington (1847 – 1885) paid the price with his head on 29th October, 1885 for attempting to reach the court of Kabaka Mwanga via Kenya. Nakasero is the seat of the Ugandan presidency today.

unburied quickly from burning
homes behind us as we dash
across ridges full of predators:
both beastly and human ones,
wondering whether we shall
ever return to at least reclaim
remains of older umbilical cords
that we were unable to uproot
from under torn pumpkin vines
when all was lost and vampirous
villains of our valleys resurrected.

*we have been set wandering
wandering in wailing lines
across soils of foreign lands
tell Mengo and tell Nakasero
by the Justice of God we say
our lament is truly a plea
gwe let them ask for our Heads!
gwe let them ask not our passports!*

Mundu khu Mundu

Ndugu Mwananchi

Your own memory grows
 Out of clear lines of history
 Your memories grow out of joy
 Your memories grow out of jest
 Your memories grow out of wealth
 Your memories grow out of health
 Your memories grow out of peace
 Your memories grow out of pride
 Your memories grow, grow and grow
 Your memories grow out of all these
 So let them grow on such straight lines of history.

History

My memories grow out of history's knots:

Knots of the blood stilled in veins
 By bludgeons after a botched poll
 Knots of the blood spilled in drains
 By common stones after a botched poll
 Knots of the infants split in wombs
 By razors bought after a botched poll
 Knots of elderly raped at early noon
 By youths drunk after a botched poll
 Knots of the kNoTs of other such knots
 Made from the KnOtS of such knots

Knots

memories grow out of
 knots.'

Out of intestines knotted by hunger
 Out of arteries knotted by anger
 Out of nerves knotted by terror
 Out of hairs knotted by horror
 Out of fingers knotted by war
 Out of fears that refuse to go

Out of fears that cannot go

Out of fear that will not go

Go

Go with us to embers of our homes

Go with us to bodies burnt into bricks

Go with us to granaries without grains

Go with us to skeletons without graves

Go with us to homes without neighbours

Go with us to land without thunder of law

Go with us to the sources of rivers of loss

Go with us to in-between land of life or death

Go with us to voices that whisper in the dark

Go with us to this our howling cannibal country

Country

The country we inherited from mother.

The country you and I were born into.

The country of our shared history

The country of this story

The country of these lines

and

kNoTs

Yes my memories grow out of KnOtS

Yet your memories grow out of clear lines

Of our history...

Obviously our future

Will be different.

36
kenya

A pot belly above
hollow bowels
howl below -
Kenyatta-Moism?

Twin pot bellies above
hollow bowls
hold below -
Kibaki-Railaism?

37
Sacrifices

She
looks at the azure horizon in the West
whispering of the agony in her hearts
one under her breast another in womb
after my plea for a midnight flight fails.

She
draws mud circles on the graveyard soil
calling each by a hundred names of God
each an invocation for my safe passage
after night falls and death comes for us.

She
leaves me standing on the grave of hope
moving towards a distant cliff in the dark
to end the two lives and a love despised
after she opts for infamy rather than see me die.

Three Words....I. D. P.

i have spoken off my heart
 words whose flight sent
 them to the six corners
 of our deaf government
 before bringing them back,
 like echoes of stubborn hope,
 into my mouth still agape,
 down dry stretches of my tongue
 down words back to my heart.

i am now an eater of own words,
 i whose parched tongue these words
 of plea had, held, then hurled free
 only for them backwards to flee,
 back through airs of apathy into me
 in tragicomic mimicry of ruminants
 that first throw in in in inward
 then out out outward then inward,
 their tasty zero-grazed grassy cuds
 or in their bid to flee time that flies not
 mount each other within same sexes in jest.

i, of these words starkly uttered,
 do solemnly take them all back in.
 To gain freedom my words tried hard
 but weren't they turned back again
 at the exit points of all our six borders?
 Now then let these words of freedom rest
 in worm nests and ulcers in my intestines,
 in the neighbourhood where my bile resides

and on my dry tongue let their aftertastes
offer me tangs of staple diets from free states.

Shadow of the Sun

The sun has crushed in on itself
 Similarly hasn't society swallowed itself?
 My new refuge now lies in eternal night.
 That my eyes see no more the nightmare,
 which my ears continue to hear here here....
 is to me the ointment on the hot torment my soul is in
 Inch by inch by inch by inch by....

as
 I
 sink
 sink
 sink sink
 sink
 Into the abyss
 of
 humanlessness.

Jeers, cheers, slurs, footfalls, feecal missiles hit me still
 rob me the anesthesia that is swift death to a wounded.
 Restless stirs my soul now steaming in hot urea of woe
 Attempts to rise out of my affliction my fall doth deepen.
 The back too is of no use when the spine in it is broken
 Such is my dilemma since that machete hit me as I fled.
 Poetic diplomacy did delay me as my kin fled our fate.
 Struck I fell into this old pit latrine to die inch after inch
 A sanguine atonement for the blood that flows in me
 The blood of the poet dying believing a cure
 To the long blood illness of ethnicity
 Torturing her native land exists.
 I the blood penance now
 In this body trapped.
 Trapped in a toilet pit.
 The pit itself trapped
 by shadows of them.

Themselves trapped
In a cycle of hate....

As

I

DESCEND DESCend descend

deepest in the cesspit my body becomes a pen

My entire memory stiffens into a sturdy ebony nib

My wounded mind turns into the stone of my epitaph

Blood becomes funeral ink, my wounds cauldrons of it

Wounds brought to me by a fresh lunacy bout of the land

This land on whose breast I have suckled the age of my life.

This land into whose earthy womb I now so reluctantly return

A still small voice breathes a last line to my scorched soul

saying:

no greater claim can a human make to the soil of her land than this.

In this shit-hole full of excreta exploding like echoes of elegies,

Melting me, muffling me, braids recently woven unfolding,

Visions of the unborn fleeing my womb comfort offer.

My unborn bury yourself in the hearts of the guilty.

Now take me naked by hand, to the land beyond,

escort me, still small voice to your yonderland

close my open wounds as I open yours closed....

After these forbidden little rites
 neither gunshot nor fired bullets
 neither diplomacy nor citizen cries
 neither constitution nor scriptures
 nor even presidential declarations
 of peace against any high stand off

with the cult can ever appease their
stoned
tenacity to ply and pry
the Law.

Repentance

(for Maina Njenga)

As he sat at the edge of life
counting drops of his age
falling in a splash of days
on the arid soil of his soul
he had a small voice speak:

"Repent and set them free."

As he sat at the edge of life
tracing his old thoughts like
Aweer soothsayers trace fate
with dyed stones tossed from
gourds 'neath ancient acacia
he had a small voice speak:

"Repent and set them free."

As he sat at the edge of life
guilt racing up his systems
like an ambulance of hope
ferrying his battered heart
to a place of timely healing
he had a small voice speak:

"Repent and set them free."

As he sat at the edge of life
his head a weight in his palms
and his eyes staring inwards
into the library of conscience
up to the portrait of Mandela
the still small voice spake:

"Set them free and
repent."

Vision of Sacrifice

the attempt to wound my eyes
 with drops of the oil of vitriol
 so that i will witness no more
 the lost hope on the faces
 of my generation and pals
 failed yet again this week
 when the giant jail gates
 opened like Heaven's gate
 and he walked out
 frail but
 free

no longer wanting to remain
 the unvoiced fake waiter at a
 meal where our annual tax
 makes the main course dish
 our children the desert
 and our future, salad
 in a grand dinner
 whose entry is
 restricted to
 bureaucrats
 parliament
 executive
 judiciary
 police
 army
 only

no longer wanting to be
Citizen No. 2166xxxx
a silent human sheep
in a flock of Kenyans
waiting to be shipped
like slaves of yore
with number tags
to the land of
no dream
no hope
nothing
null

....

no longer wanting to remain
always breathless dodging
the long paws of laws
of our predator state
with cannibal tastes
hunter of its own:
chewing on them
their children
children's
children
child

....

no longer wanting to be be
in daily acts of resistance
met with resistance
and broil force met
with brute force
FORCE
FORCE
force
more

force
finally

....

i had opted to end my sight
that I may like a hermit
live on the fringes
of unnatural
darkening
silence
filled
with
still
me

....

yet
at this moment of action
finger deep in sulphuric soup
and eyes raised heavenwards
fixed on the pure white peaks
of the mountain of a stoned God
breast heaving with bitter betrayal
blasphemy mixing with bitter bile within
i heard that the great leader had been set free
his voice called me back and I let my eyesight be.

Return of Hope

Yesterday

Long tears drip drop inwards.
Into the void of hopelessness,
inside the skeletal bodies around him,
the tears tear the heart
and fall into the empty bowels
in a silent splash...

Today

From unmapped lands beyond there,
they came.
From fields full of petals of blood in bloom,
they came.
From where grains of wheat paint dry dreams,
they also came...
to see him touch the home soil from out of the dark skies...

Now

Long tears mingle with dawn mist, dew
flowing outward freely to soak his Versace shirt
as they surge forth like stone ropes of hope,
forth through cold, barbed, perimeter wires
guarding the empty national airport...
to him whose voice was once their own.

Peace on the Leaves of Heaven

The night sticks to her skin
 like the black flowing buibui
 gown silky she specially adorns
 whenever the night date occurs
 despite temperatures of rage
 rising across squatting qat farms
 and among the two peoples
 inhabiting
 these hills where leaves of heaven
 grow.

The moon descends lower
 like a serpentine eavesdropper
 perched up a forbidden tree of fruit
 as the two turn on under its canopy!
 as under it the mute two turn on
 on a mat made of leaves of heaven
 with the moonless night as duvet.

The crickets chant a bawdier
 ballad to the melting hearts
 as the two in urgent love breath!
 as the two breath in urgent love!
 until they heat up in arousal
 and sex aroma of *jeaayl* arises
 as does the perfume of jasmine
 she wears - liquid gift from garissa.

Rifle shots echo somewhere
 in the valley of stones and khat
 disrupting their couplet rhythm
 for an eternal micro-minute.
 silence returns like a blessing

from higher than man & miraa
and the mating two turnn wildd!
in their craft of dangerous love
ignoring the eloquence of reason
speaking in the foe footfalls nearing.

Such is the midnight scene
where the oldest of all sins
becomes an illicit hope sign
exchanged by two enemies.

cushitic tongues utter soft cries,
startled,
as they take off...
hard bantu swear words,
alarmed,
hot on their heels.

Statue of Bones

How
 many bones will it take
 to construct our very own
 towering statue of liberty?

How
 many human bones,
 pure white primate stones
 will it really honestly take?

How
 many for a national statue
 far far taller than that of Kimathi
 or Kenyatta on their seats of stone?

How
 many for a statue so high
 that it crests the towering rooftop
 of our soaring capital city centre?

How
 many at the mecca of our motherland
 for such a statue macroscopic from the sky
 to every tourist of all nations jetting down?

Imagine!
 such a statue, bone-white splendour
 shimmering in the heat of tropical noonshine,
 spectacular to folk of all stations flocking the city!

Imagine!
 such a statue guarded by GSUs,
 red-beretted paramilitary with GPMGs

ring-fencing this hallowed soul of a nation!

Imagine!

such a colossal national statue,
our ethnicities solidified in tonnes of bones
staring heavenward like a giant dying christ!

Imagine!

the graves or say granaries of bones
we have harvested each season of elections
and what a world wonder we too can build!

Come on!

Isn't it is such statues with miniature imitations
in town and country that may like light towers to sailors,
perhaps guide us home after electoral ego-trips to Chaos?

At the Stone Bench

a bench of stone curves in its semi circle
 sinking down in micro-inches into the city
 with each evening that comes and goes.
 the texture of its concrete skin is smooth
 it is the result of the weight of farts from
 the weak citizens of a nation in recession.

Bench of Thoughts: leaders call it in awe
 each time they drive limos by to parliament
 or a media briefing on constitutional talks
 or a meal with foreign dignitaries, or porn.
 all hail the Hon. Prof. Metropolis Minister
 for his Stone Benches Bill and its benefits!

on the bench each evening sits an idle city
 or at least some of her sons and daughters
 as they plot petty crimes or pawn their lives
 or bony bodies to raise the coins for bus fare
 back to the suffocating slums they flee daily
 only to return to like a man cursed by a god
 to always run in circles all his years of youth.
 not all on the bench do illegal deals or deeds
 the stone to some is the seat for daydreams,
 urban fantasies or fits of pseudo-philosophy.
 others appoint speakers from their quorums
 speakers must own a copy of a popular daily.
 they parody Parliament and its petite politics
 shouting laws of commonsense at each other
 in accented versions of the national language
 or counter motions in bare-knuckle fist fights.

Sly Speakers always calm all by keeping quiet -
 imitating artfully the Ruler of this ailing republic.

The Sheng'sphere Sequence

a

union of youth

(pare pare makutano junction tumetoka ni razma tukutane....tu.)

*Hii Kenya ni yetu tu na lazima tuwe kitu moja.
Sii nii huku kumeshona tutao tunaitwa makutano?
Lakini sielewi kwanini huwa mataim hatukutani
Na sisemi eti ucheke kiufala na si stori ya utani
We sorora map ya ma province ka tano
Na zote utaget zina hutu tu tao tao
kwa wajaka, wakiuk, wakale au wakao
na bata kwa wasee wa huko kosto*

*Hutu tutao hua mara mob tuna tughetto
Tuko nyuma ya tushop shop flani hivi
place mamama pima hao hututolea show
Za kuuzia vitu gava haitaki kabisa kiivihivi
Wasee wakue nazo kama mchuma na mudi
Kama makuro na tabtab, maporno na weedi
Masidi feki, kaunga hivi na mataim dvd feki
Vitu mob tu zenye najua we unajua tunajua*

*Saa kizee kitu hubaki ikinshangazaa sana tu
style mi hushangaa na ndoa ya PM na PNU,
Ni enyewe venye si marijana hubandana
Kama makarao na wasee wa mungix bana
Kila time tukiwa tunaingia stori za kura tu.
Lakini si si tumegro up pamoja ghetu pamoja?
Pamoja ka Bogi Benda na maBiele zake pamoja
Pamoja tu sana ka Abnvasi na risto zake pamoja
pamoja pamoja ka Juha Kalulu na dogi yake pamoja*

Masmata wa kisonko tumehanda mtaani pia pamoja
Hizi chuo saa zingine shbbh tumechoma pia pamoja
Hizo stori za muadhara shbbh na magava pia pamoja
Hizo stori za kusota pale jobless corner pia pamoja
Hizo stori za zile stori unanoo wasinoo...pamoja...
Yaani kapamoja hapa,
palepamoja pamoja,
sii si huaga
getha?

Saasa
kwanini si hutendana ki hivyo mazee
Ile time kura yo hukam na vijana hatukutani kabisaaa kizee?

b
Interpreters of Vision 2030⁵

(wakalimani wa ndoto 2030)

(Author's Advice: before you read the poem, have the image of our ubiquitous street-corner evangelical pastors and their translators in mind. Go ahead now).

maili tatu mashariki mwa jiji letu kuu
two kilometres to the east of the city
batua mia tatu magharibi mwa mashariki hii
three hundred feet west of this east
ukivuka toka mahali fulani kando ya barabara kuu
across the street from a certain place
utaona duka dogo linzalo sanaa zetu za kale tu
there stands a small shop of antiquities.
wanauza sanaa adimu sana za tamaduni zetu
they sell our old pasts captured in art objects

⁵ Vision 2030 is a long term comprehensive national plan to (apparently) transform the lives of Kenyans for the better. <http://www.nesc.go.ke/News&Events/KenyaVision2030Intro.htm>

ni pale pale nilienda pale kabatini pembeni -
palipo pangwa mambo ya watu wale wa kale -
 it is here among shelves of nameless things
na kupagawishwa na kitabu cha zama fulani
 that i came across the tattered manuscript
kilikunwa kimekunjwa kama jamvi ya waswahili
kicha kika thidirinwa daani ya shupa moja pare
 (excuse me, Ngai Fafa! - **wiping dripping sweat**)
kisha kika sindiliwa ndani ya chupa moja pale!
 rolled and stuffed deep into an ageless bottle.

(Author's Advice: dear reader, at this juncture each turns
the back to the other
before they shriek in unison each in his language to
crowds on opposite sides of a dias)

one
 two
 ready
 go!
 Haiya!

"it bore the handwritten title of this poem!
 the manuscript, the author tells readers,
 is best not read at all or even interpreted!
 it is best when you take a page out of it!
 roll it into a conical tube the size of bhang!
 then peep through it at a certain location!
 in the night sky when the moon is full!
 the location is exactly two kilometres!
 to the east of the city three hundred feet!
 west of this east across the street from!
 the square where the founding father!
 sits staring into the fate of his republic!!"

*"hajui mtu umri haswa wa kitabu chenyele!
 ila lugha iliyotumika ni hii hii yako na yangu!
 na kichwa cha kitabu ndio pia cha shairi bili!
 baada ya kukohoa mara saba vumbi puani!
 nilikifungua talatibu na kusoma utangulizi!
 kitabu kilidai kwamba hakikuandikwa kusomwa!
 hakikuandikwa kutafsiriwa au kuchambuliwa!
 hakikuandikwa kufaidi wale wazee wa kale!
 hakikuandikwa na binadamu ila na ndoto!
 kiliendelea kuropokwa kwamba ukweli huu!
 utajulikana tu pale utakopofuata hatua hizi:*

*""rejea maili tatu mashariki mwa jiji letu kuu!!
 hatua mia tatu magharibi mwa mashariki hii!!
 ukivuka toka mahali fulani kando ya barabara kuu!!
 utaona sanamu kuu ya mwanzilishi wa taifa letu hili!!
 alikoketi kwenye kiti cha mawe macho ikitazama juu!!
 tazama anapotazama kwa kutengeza darubini kuu!!
 ukitumia makaratasi ya kitabu hiki cha wahenga wetu!!
 baada ya kutenda tendo hili mara alfu mbili na thelathini!!
 mbio timua ka ndereba hadi ikulu wewe ni nabii wape ukweli huu!!""*

C

so silazima to do.....

*Silazima
 tufanye blunt mapanga
 kwa zile mawe kando ya roadee
 buku tukiimba wimbo za o? za ocha
 kuhusu damu ya mafala tunahanda
 mafala wenye kiukweli ni maneighbor fulani
 eti ju kura ishaibiwa na hawa wasenge fulani
 wakutoka place fulani ni lazima wafanyiwe kitu fulani...*

si

*poa kuchonga hio panga kwa lami
 alafu kuzama nyuma ya mabush fulani
 kama mtu tatu na ngeta yake mtaa fulani
 buku tukitega tuu hao maneighbour fulani
 tuwashtue kwa kuwarukia kutoka kichakani
 tuwakimbize kaa wezi wa simu hapo hapo mtaani
 tuwakimbize kaa wameiba nokia ya fan wa nonini
 tuwakimbize maze buku wakupiga manduru fulani
 wakiita majina ya mapero wetu na ya Sir God fulani
 tuwakimbize na mapanga tuwakimbishe na mautoni
 mpaka either moyo zao zi burst au tuzibastishe si wenyewe.
 Enyewe si lazima to do muadbara kaa hii si mayouth wa kenya.*

si

*poa kuhandana ati juu tu ya kura na siasa
 mataim tuliimba loyalty pledge pamoja skuli
 tulikunywa ile milk ya nyayo pamoja skuli
 tulicheza kalongo, kati na bano pamoja skuli
 tulilipana mabano after crack-no-payee skuli
 tulijua firstbody hadi lastbody roosafi skuli
 tulibreak voice tukiclear KCPE pamoja skuli
 tulimasturbate kiwajo vajo mataim pia skuli
 tulino tofaut ya kangeta na veve gether skuli
 alaf sas tunahandan ki?..kikabila kila sehem mtaan!
 kwanin? Nilazma, really? mtuwangu aisee be real!*

alafu

*hizo stori za kutegea pale highway
 ma-three zina jina kama Msamaria Mwema
 alafu tunashika dere mashati peupe yaani
 tukimpiga mbao ka mbao wathii wakijiharia
 alafu tukifungua mlango wachomoe ma IDs
 kila mtu na yake mkononi sura zao hatuoni
 alafu tukipata jina inaanza na W, O, au K*

(sijui itakuaje kwa wasee katikati ka mimi)

*tunamvuta kutokea kwa window kisoldier
alafu jamaa anajaribu kutoka nduki mazee
tunamwacha ka venye pussy huacha panya
alafu anakimbia akilia kwa sheng' akilia tu sana
sisi tunamjibu kwa lugha bata poa hatumanyi
alafu tunampiga sweep ka ile ya soccer za tene
alafu mazee tunamkata. alafu tunamkatakata. tu.*

Sa kwanini?

Kwani ni lazima?

Si lazima to do...

d

Matha ya Mathangu na Me

*Aisee! the evenings ziko now behind me
those that used ku bring tears to me
when ile taste ya tea ili mean misery
na like mint near eyes zangu, gave me
always a blinder perception ya reality.*

*Aisee! the evenings ziko now behind me
when matha ya mathangu and me
would share a teapot ya bitter tea
na loaf moja ya mkate of serenity
as story ya family sina left her for me*

*Aisee! the evenings ziko now behind me
when ile voice yake will become free
ka kale ka voice ka tenee ka Sherazade
weaving macobwebs za family fantasy
binding me kinoma making only my ears see*

*Aisee! the evenings ziko now behind me
msee when matha ya mathangu and me
tungelisten buda ya matha aki go pee*

*behind kale ka wattle hut, all ile tea
buku Death ikitumatch nearby, closely*

*Aisee! the evenings ziko now behind me
when shosho will not let the past be
as repeatedly ali try ku empty memory
za venye ki tribal mapero zangu walidedi
kwangu ili nianze pia kuwekea wanted wathii!*

e

shadow ya buda ya budangu

*alibonganga for hours to his own shadow
changing themes shadow iki change height,
change zote mbili zikimaparallel na ages zetu.*

*alibonganga for long without sip ya oxygen
chasing memories ziki run away from him
zikigwaya ma boredom he subjected them to.*

*he talked for me kwa mabuda zetu before him
akichant family epics kunishow vile kuwa man
vile kuwa man wa war na vile damu yetu ni so.*

*he talked for long to me hizo nights bila end
chastising me niki show ati ka sign of kukuwa softi
then akakitoa tu without me, shadow ya name yake.*

f

pale pale

*Wanaketi kwa malandi pale pale wanaosha
Wanaketi kwa malandi pale pale wanawake
Wanaketikwa malandi pale pale wawili wale
Wanaosha tu. Kwa malandi. Wawili wale*

Pale Pale.

*Kwanini wanaketi wanaosha na hawabongi?
Kwanini wanaketi wawili na bata hawabongi?
Kwanini sasa wanaosha na bata hawabongi?
Kwanini sasa wanawake hawa hawangaliani?*

*Wanaosha tu wakiketi pale pale kwa malandi
Wanaosha tu lakini ebu cheki kinjaro pale pale
Wawili hawa wanawake wanaosha si ndio wale
Wawili walisema ati waliokota shati za wanaume
Wao moja ikiwa na stains za damu ya kule kule
Na moja ikiwa na stains ya damu ya pale pale?
Mme mmoja ashadedi mwingine ashaingia gizaani.
Sad story ya pale pale unaknow tunaknow sasa.*

Mataim cHINI YA mOgOKA

*Najua mataim zishapita kiasi tu
Zenye tungekula tumogoka tu aisee
Tukibonga bonga tustori bila maana
Ati kujidistract ili tusiongeongee siasa
Lakini kumbuka tu polite kukula vako
Haiezi hata siku moja shibisha msee.*

*Ukitry kufanya hivo utakuwa ka beste
Alinambiaga kanajua jua pia ina shadow
Na ati shadow ya jua huaga tu hatuioni
Kwajili hatujawahi relax kabisa na mogoka
Hadi ile steam ibambe hadi eyes zi pop out
Hadi zipop pop pop out zikaitafute hio shadow
Zituonyeshe sisi zituonyese sisi shadow ya sun!*

*Elewa kuna watu na viatu na kila viatu ina watu wake
Na kila watu wana wanaviatu yao. Hii sio kitu hard*

*Msee kunyita kwa hio nisiji repeat repeat ka ulimi ile
Ulimi ile ulimi ile ya Kibaki akiwa bado hajapona kabisa.*

*Mataimi mtu huogopa kubonga
Mataim mtu huogopa kunyamaza
Mataim mtu huogopa kuwa mhuzuni
Mataim mtu huogopa kutoogopa
Mataim sheria ni macho ya mauti
Macho inacheki wathii mahalpopote
Waliko hata wakijificha nyuma ya sura
Zao au wakijificha nyuma ya kidole moja
kidole kimoja haiuvi chawa lakini inapiga
kura inapiga au pinga kura hadi inakuwa purple....*

*Mataim kura ni ile vako ya kugwaya
Ati msee unagwayagwaya mpaka
Unahara tonsils zikiclink ka shilingi!
Mataim ni ile kugwaya mtu hugwaya
Hadi anachukua fingas zake na kujii....
Nakujinyonga talatiibu talatiibu hadi adedi
Kabla hajadedishwa ati sababu ya kura kura.*

*Mataim ni ile time unabang bang kichwako
Kwa ukuta beng beng beng beng beng beng
Ndani ya jela ukiitwa now ati suspect wa PEV
beng beng beng beng beng beng BENG!
Hadi karao wa nightshift ana plug maskio zake
Na sigara au bangi akisema akiwaka utajua mathake.*

*Mataim ni kubaad muthee kushinda hata kumbafu
Mataim ndio place dreams zo humea kama dundruffs
Siunakumbuka akili ni nywele na kila ina dundruffs yake
Sa mataim humea ndani ya nywele ka madness ya msanii
Anakumbuka story za mataim kura yo huleta msee kuchizika
especially mathake akiishi kwa IDP na yeye lazima astey abroad.*

g
Kunguru za Molo

*Hapa kwa hizi hills wind ina blow
Katikati ya mashake, row kwa row,
row za machakula zetu na za majirani
kunguru sasa zina circlecircle zinafurahi
zikicheki vile vita inapika food yao below.*

*Hapa kwa hizi hills kura ishakua war
Tangu Kibaki abaki rais story sai si rahisi
Inabidi night ulale mitini mchana barabarani
Si ati tunapenda war. No. sisi ni walima amani.*

*Ila time ikishatokea pale neighbour anakuwa adui
Na inakuwa hard kutofautinisha madoadoa za chui
Ati gani iko more round kushinda gani na gani kubwa
Life ikisink low hadi inafikia levels kaa hizi za kuunawa
Inakuwa sio easy kumaintain peace kama mpenda amani
Kwa hiyo unless system ichange tutazidi kila kura jamani
Kutengeza food za kunguru zimeshajua after five years tu
Binadamu huchinja ubinadamu zaidi kwa hills hizi za buku.*

h
Quest ya Uhuru

Uhuru ni ile coffin
ndani ya vault ya memory yako
Imezungukwa na piling skeletons
za our free-thought fighters wa tene.
Ndani ya this national tomb ya regret
Debris za democracy zina pile up
Each pile a generation of uchungu
older than pile chini yake pale pale.

rumour old zinasema ati only

through mabuda ndio unaeza get it

Uhuru is in the tomb of regrets
mwisho ya memory lane,
buried deep inside pale pale
in the heart of the motherland,
guarded by the phantoms
za kina Pio Gama Pinto na JM Kariuki,
whose resilience ka ya stone through
the ages still makes me sing
hip hop anthems of freedom in
all ngoma za this banana republic yetu yetu.

rumournew zinasema ati only
Through mavijana ndio unaeza get it

i
Mseeiya!

What if uki stroll back to a past
Ina still stand behind yako in time
Back back back up zile rodi za pure lust
Back kabsa to life ile hai taste ka lime?
Jili it is never ever late joo kwa hii life
Kuwithdraw from mapenzi ka pain
Na kutema any Jezebel of a wife
So that msee u replan maisha again.
Love ya kuhanya na bling promises
Cheki vile zimekukost your thirties.
With kila wiki now your woe increases
Mseeiya! Owner mpya wa tongue ya elegies
Ebu kaa chini long kwa dimanga za thought
Na maisha yako maze uanze tu kiasi kui replot!

In the Shadow of Dedan Kimathi

now

the tremors around the city and terror
 are thunderbolts in the heart of the land
 as I the youth riot away without fear.
 as skies become my bespectacled eyes
 rain amidst thunder claps my tears be.
 wipe a way wide for me through tear gas
 as i dodge stone or bullet on smoky streets
 chuukuchukuchuuukuchuku! chukuuu!
 CCHUUUUKKKKU like bolts of lightning!
 from starehe to kasarani
 from makadara to embakasi
 from lang'ata to kamukunji
 from westlands to dagoretti

now

marathon like tergat to the statue of kimathi
 be distracted not by shrill sounds of sirens
 or the helter-skelter motion of city humanity.
 sprint with me now to the statue of kimathi
 then lift your eyes high like begging hands
 to the assault rifle he clenches like his history.
 perhaps perhaps then you will learn not to ask
 why i ask to die, to die with fists full of stone
 after I, a poet, takes to this jungle of concrete
 resisting too those who muzzle my one vote
 resisting hard as did daring dedan and all those
 others in the age between his own and restless us!

a nation of advocates

their eyes shine ever brighter with wet wisdom
that swims in lazy spirals like waves in the pots
from which they drink with reed straws illicit beer
made of millet, yeast and water as hot as the sun.

their eyes shine bright with widening new wisdom
as the plantain leaves above clap natural accolades
to egg them on as they indulge in breaking the law
and arguments on clauses in the proposed constitution.

dusk will come both to the land and their liquid mind
and as they stagger stagger from the dim plantation pub
quarreling about their bills, legal points and non-points
each will go home a wiser expert on constitutional law.

in the land called k, adults, youth and scores of infants
have evolved in the past two decades into advocates
shrugging away their real professions or non-professions
to acquire a taste for talking law even as they break it.

96

.....A 3-PhDs mendicant with a large bulbous head here in
Nairobi County scavenges
somewhere on bee-busy Boulevard Vision 2030
Aisee! Boulevaard Vision 20.....30
the hope artery at the heart of this deluxe 24-hour African
economy powerhouse!

Voila! Mon Cheri bloody*&%\$*!
Booulevaard Vision Twennnnny Thirry! Lo Behold!
Boulevard Vision 2030
with its seven statues standing for the 7 ex-public universities of
Kenya
Boulevard Vision 2030
built on the grave of what used to be Delamere then Kenyatta
Avenue
Boulevard Vision 2030
with its towering varsitycrapers that compete with others in
Lagos & Juba
Boulevard Vision 2030
see how the degree-oozing flatulence of the oil-rich Kenyans
scream of it
Boulevard Vision 2030
next to Dr Kibaki Monument, Dr Kalonzo Park,
Dr Ruto Road and Dr Karua Square
Boulevard Vision 2030
the most African-made avenue south of Bangui new uni
textbooks gossip so
Boulevard Vision 2030
where the mall of PhD ATMs stands a floor each to each of the
2030 varsities
Boulevard Vision 2030
where refugees rickshawing multitudes of Kenyan profs earn a
dollar a day still
Boulevard Vision 2030

where the 9th governor of Nairobi county has recently paraded
with campus gays
Boulevard Vision 2030
where we parade our uni-made pseudo-nuclear armament on
new national holidays
Aisee! Boulevaard Vision 20.....30
the hope artery at the heart of this deluxe 24-hour African
economy powerhouse!

BV2030
It is here here
where the mendicants of meritocratic Kenya nowadays
hang out in or hang themselves with
overflowing uni gowns of black, white, red and green hues
Dished freely by the 2030 legal universities operating in
the booming business of degrees
forged daily like thousands of spam-emails
from the famous fraud giant of Africa
Most of the mendicants have 3 PhDs, wear layers of polythene
coats
to cover their toilet-roll-printed degree certificates
cherished here dearly like the smiling portrait of the president
Especially on National Rain Month (NRM) when the national
airforce sends 100 Northrop F-5s
into the vast dry sky to fight drought-caused hunger below
by bombarding the republic amicably with Free Government
Rain (FGR)
Now that rain has migrated from Kenya ever since 75% of the
counties defecated
from God to Scientology in this era of Science-based
Leadership.

BV2030
It is here here
really where the mendicant voice

speaking in this psychedelic photo of words squats on jittered
 toes
 Behind the New Graduation Square
 Defecating and chatting about the new times and the old
 decades
 with kaleidoscopic obese flies
 that buzzbuzz in trendy Neo Sheng' too like his spectators.
 Well, as he defecates with public permission, a holder of 6
 PhDs:
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 is not about
 the attempt to secede by one of the PhDless counties
 at the border
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 is not about
 the scrapping of all the humanities in all Kalenjin counties units
 across Rift Valley in 2026 AD
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 is not about
 the re-election of the first nubian president
 of People's Federal Republic of Kenya (PFRK)
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 is not about
 the uproarious weekly parliament-led ndombolo street
 jamborees
 paid for by World Bank in the new African Leaders Lead by
 Entertainment Program (ALLEP)
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 is not also about
 the noise pollution the public paraffin-helicopters cause
 ferrying university commuters of Nairobi
 His loudest of curses while contorting in excretion
 as obese he empties his empty bowels learnedly,
 is that the Boulevard Vision 2030 has gone private,
 a university just bought it.

51
Cure by Fire

Now

some needs exist across our nation that require fire to cure
certain citizens search for special solutions such as infernos.
Take the evident example of this tobacco you and I puff away
at new smoking zones designated around our public city
lavatories.

See

My blood is of two mountain lands: Elgon and Kerenyaga
Some of my people in the west subsist near ancient Malakisi.
It is here for four generations where some grow tobacco only
on loamy slopes of Elgon between Bungoma and Busia border
Rows upon rows of tender tobacco give farmlands a sense of
order

Bantu backs bent under whip rays of sun toil generation after
another
Tending the emerald leaves, eking livelihoods, calling the crop,
mother.

The weak pay-cheques roll in especially when dried tobacco
heads to the kilns
It is here here in colossal kilns of iron and stone that this crop
finds its final cure
Kin, soonest it reaches our lungs a fiery smoke as we surrender
in addiction to its lure.

Yes

there are certain everyday needs that require treatment by fire
There are several special treatments that require a curing red-hot
fire

The cure from the kilns at Malakisi is not unlike that for our
urban tiles

The cure from the kilns at Malakisi is not unlike that for our
rural bricks

The heat cure from the kilns at Malakisi is the same as that for
our crematoria

The heat cure from the kilns at Malakisi is the same as for
terracotta pots in Bogoria
Inferno from the kilns can cure MANY national needs,
occasionally killing few lungs.
Inferno from the kilns can as some say cure spiritual needs too,
for those with sin pangs.
But
it cannot should not must not be used as cure for ANY ethnic
needs
Alas! radio reports reach all ears around the nation of a new
cure to our ethnic needs.
At the heart of the Great Rift Valley they cure ethnic hate as we
do tobacco with kilns.
The radios say, like leaves of tobacco ready some people were
rushed down the streets
After the national vote turned kiln-hot in a lake-side
neighborhood of distant Naivasha.
Rushed down street to a house by the lake, like Malakisians rush
tobacco to the kilns for cure,
some lake citizens were tossed into this house-kiln to cure them
diseases of hybridity, the radios say.
Decades ago my grandpa's radio told him and he me, a sad
story on misuses of kilns in
Auschwitz.....

Reconciliation

(After the signing of the 28.02.2008 National Accord)

Kenyans

the ghouls of guilt today haunt this great rift
 between borders linking my losses to your own.
 the silence between us is loud but much welcome
 and so is the incessant buzz of greenblue insects.
 the !! stench in the air is now gone like our old agony
 the blood dust is no more our clouds, no more around us
 the black smoke is fading away as our tembers cool and cool
 the pink flamingos have returned and grass now grow again
 soon our herds of blue wildebeestes will also be back in Mara
 golden hours of silence we now observe tolerantly, are a
 holiday.

kin, we can rise out of the ruins of our former republic
 like our forbearers in old city-states did after assaults
 from old breakers of nations, the maritime Portuguese.
 we can rise out of the ruins of our brutal rogue republic
 with our fate firm in our hands as we wait for our next
 commission of inquiry to inquire on the special inquiries
 made by the commissions sent to arrest and reconcile us
 by our union of the Africans and the union of world nations,
 halfway into our demolition of corner stones of the brute state
 if we talk less less but work more in silence we can rise again.
 if we talk less at each other work more together yes we can.

(Chants)

Yes we can!

Si we can?

Yes we can!

SI WE CAN??

YES WE CAN!!

YOTE YAWEZEKANA BANA! BANA! SANA!

53
the still small voice

Elders of El Molo:
we have sat with a committee from Ghana
sent spiritually by Africans of this land west.
we have sat with these elders from Nkrofol
where spirits of Atlantic sing to umbilicals
of the Nzima community that gave Gold Coast
the good late *Osagyefo* Kwame Nkurumah.

*We have listened to their words of wisdom
From this distant land of the African West
Both in speeches and in Nzema oral proverbs*

Elders of El Molo:
we have sat with a committee from
Tanzania
sent spiritually by Africans of this
land east.
we have sat with these elders from
Musoma
where Lake Victoria spirits sing to
umbilicals
of the Zanaki community that gave
Tanganyika
the good late *Mwalimu* Julius
Kambarage Nyerere.

*We have listened to their words of wisdom
From this nearer land of the African
East
Both in speeches and in Zanaki oral
proverbs*

Elders of El Molo:

the conclusion was as unanimous as our voice now
that we come to you El Molo with high humility
that we come to you El Molo hearts in our hands
that we come to you our wise Lilliputians of old
even in your anger, hunger, or stares full of scold...

(silence)

that we come to your old homeland fellow citizens
not without apology for the agony that you exist in
on this forgotten corner north of our joint republic;
not without remorse for the remoteness you live in
sandwiched by bloodlines of Samburu and Turkana
which slowly swallow your own like the new dam
upstream in Ethiopia on River Omo surely looks set
to swallow this lifeline lake you claim as your future.

Elders of El Molo:

Do cast down your crocodile-hunting
harpoons of old

Sink your Doum palm-trunk rafts
down into the Jade Sea
Bring down all your Doum palm fronds
and acacia igloos

Sink your fears of the
government of Nairobi in this lake
Cast down your weights of history and
new memories

Sink your fears of us
and arise if only for Kenya's sake.

Leaders of El Molo:

Let it be written down in verse on the page
of our today
That called upon to counsel before a civil
war's outbreak

Called upon by history, destiny and this
national resolution...

(silence)

“...The tiniest tribe of this republic did
not shy away at all

From the decision declaring it the
permanent presidents of Kenya.

El Molos relocated to the seat of the
nation and saved us from us.”

My Other Mother

the housemaid who taught me about me
arrived from uganda with a broken heart
she bore it in her brawny, brown, broken
body and sometimes on her thick tongue
at other times she carried it in her great...
desolation.

the housemaid who taught me my history
bathed me in silence then sat near me down
before letting her misery stand above us high
like the lone bulb high above dangling by chain
at the very centre of the living room in great...
desolation.

she
let her voice cry in that language unfamiliar
that resembled the one my foreign grandma
spoke whenever she visited us with diabetes
and slept close to me daynightdreaming loud...
at times.

her
cry talked about an old mud latrine she lived in
for three nights before she ascended to earth
and saw her home as a heap of blooded ashes
around which scattered lay her family in death...
at times.

such times
the cry climaxes when she holds tiny me closer
and looking outside the window at red sunsets,
whispers a sodden melody mixed with lips blood!

she cries:
"aloni mama you lefti me aloni mama"

not asking why, i say:
"alooooonimamaa!"

she cries louder cries:
"aloonii maamaa you leftii me aloonii maama"

not asking why, i say louder say:
"aaalllooonnniiimmmaamma!!"

still? you say.

yes
still
till

now about such times, at times i reminisce
i wonder whether she still sings out somewhere
in uganda and I wonder whether as a mama
she lives her own alone the way her mama
left her and she in turn left me like mama
never to return or rather only to return
as a mint of memory
from my misty history

NgetaAATHRRrchokelykkg!

the muggers of my city of birth:
 they loaf oft in River Road bars
 escorting the daytime to its end
 following parliament proceedings
 on a shrill TV in the cashier's cage
 some mimic politics and politicians
 or parody both in vulgar vernacular
 some with wage coins drink drafts
 or play poker with pink prostitutes
 some wiggle buttocks to no rhythm
 others bargain near urinal corridors
 some scratch faecal graffiti off walls
 cross-calculating clever little swindles
 or their shares in city stock exchange.

when the clocks strike fiveish or six
 most raise their streetwise selves
 from the warm fart-drenched seats
 and join masses on the cold streets.
 they always queue at busy busstops
 pausing for a plump pocket or purse
 from which they fish their free fares.
 if not caught and after ire of traffic jams,
 you alight together with them at home
 then you all walk as old neighbours do
 throwing hellos around as you hurry on
 avoiding all potholes and police patrols
 then as you go down those dim old lanes
 to your flats, exclamations rent the air....
 NgetaAATHRRrchokelykkg!

56
2008

(for SDP & MGv)

2008.....2008.....2008.
*i am a writer in the midst of the block
miles away from the writer's desk
searching for words in me
here in the ancient lamu
our land now restless
like the spirit
within us
this year
2008.*

winding through the humid wave of time,
i walk past whispers of islam around me,
open my eyes to the ancient accents
that sit in writ on doors of fading arabic
near the flat of kupona daughter of msham
looking, lost, at the mists of distant manga;
past the old omani fort and german post office
past the farting asses under the sweating lads
who smile out of lust, hashish, luck and hope,
their african faces shifting into arab and back
amidst of sweltering white heat and mirages black.

*i type down musings on a blank notebook at
the back of my brown black-white head all
sounds from the sands of lamu time
invoking, praying in a silence sublime
as i keep asking why the muse comes not?
why despite wait and rite the muse speaks not?
why the muse speaks to me not!
then....*

echoes of maulidi chant now in archaic tongue:
quranic snippets breathed into breezy isle life
from the craned necks of circles in faith,
interspersed with the click-clang of dry sticks,
offer a background sound to a new old nativity
ceremony that gives lamu fame and islamic fervour.
i let old languorous lamu lines sing to me, sing to my soul
then voices within me start to speak and so does the muse!

i have earned credit among scribes of this elegant motherland
who have offered flavours of literature to the national heritage;
with short and long ourstories has my pen served the republic.
here stand i now not so far from the riyadha mosque, soul-heart
of lamu, at the end of a labyrinth of hieroglyphic donkey lanes,
a step back into time, into region and religion histories
listening to enveloping echoes of habibswaleh jamallely
giving me the source and light of a forthcoming work:
possibly a prose on our tragic post-election violence.

Relatives for Hire

Nowadays strangeness is normal
in the ailing nation of my birth.
The strangeness of our normality
is a case of the fittest shall survive.
Let us take the common example
of the lucrative business of death.
New service-providers daily emerge
since the economy entered the ICU.
You have now probably heard on radio
that funerals are the new big venture
where dwindling hopes or investments
can be injected with instant new lives!

Take the example of my relatives
who sold their ancestral graveyards
to invest in the shares of the only
funeral service of its kind around.
The service offers relatives for hire.
They wail wildly - but without tears -
at funerals of daily dying beloveds.
Of course services on offer vary.
For example at an extra little fee
the wailers can find litres of tears
to impressively wash away your loss!

Normal work days here start at dusk.
When a weak sun faces its own death
that is when the wailers to work set.
They approach a client homestead
like strangers of any normal village
then halt abruptly by the broken gate,
wear their make up or mourning faces,
then storm, as if amok, the compound

like a new band of real blood relatives
wailing elegies to the dead bread-winner,
calling in dirge a name newly crammed,
extolling the sweet bitterness of death!

The Wailing of Uncle B

"The Wailing of Uncle B" is
 a fantabulous story,epic of sorts,
 on experiences of a thin black exile
 from a dark continent who survived
 strange exilic horrors to heroically attain
 the most revered of European citizenships.
 Now that he is finally a fat 'white', wailing
 has become his most preferred an approach
 of singing his memories as he beg-beg begs
 for bottles of beer in Berlins Afrikanische bars.

The plane that left Nairobi for

/ -----
 / -----
 / ---

Europe via Nasser's Cairo had
 an extra load unaccounted for
 by the official records of both
 the airport and airline service.
 The load was the thin Uncle B.
 He hid for hours between boxes
 in this deed did he enter Europe
 and since then has never ever left.
 Though right Germans say that German
 citizenship is a rainbow they insist that
 to be a German is a matter of blood and genes.

Yet here is Uncle B from Kenya
 whose contribution to this nation
 is both in terms of his citizenship
 and the litres of DNA he he has
 poured for long singlehandedly
 in several and spread blood lines

of the great German nation
and whose result is fifteen families
all over this old vast land made of
whitish Germans who bear
Kenyanish genes and
German ones and
call him either dad,
grand dad
great grand dad
or at least
Uncle.

He will enter the bar
with a hiphop swagger
an octogenerian dressed
in gangsta clothes and a
hip NY baseball cap too
shining shiny shining shiny
with bling bling to the toes.
He will remove his cap and
bandana place them on
the spacious rickety tin table
then sloowishly-sly survey
the new black faces around
of young wide-eyed immigrants
finding the right answer that none
is older than him, B chuckles chuckles
like a parrot mimicking its own thoughts
before he nods nods nods his baldness.

When the plates without food
are on the bar table placed
and beer in half-filled glasses
moved to the extreme side
then the curio ash tray emptied
and space on the tin table cleared

by the rotund proprietor herself
and nobody less,
never ever,
that is when the wailing
of Uncle B starts.

The tortuous tales of Uncle B and
his memories are like unwritten epics
of dark heroes who travel in boats or
under aeroplanes to the colder lands
of Europe
from the savannahs yonder,
heat-drenched deserts
greenish rain forests
rock clothed mountain ranges
or sprawling steppes
of hot and dark mosquitatorial continents.
What makes B's tortuous story haunting is him.

When Uncle B's wail overthrows oxygen,
Berlin stands still
the trains freeze
on their rails
and eagles on flags
stand still in mid air
with military precision.
The busy streets still too.
Life freezes for many minutes
breathless minutes of statue pose
as his wail takes over the whole
meaning of this life
and he stands amidst all
this petrification
his mouth agape
the voices of agony
pouring out in litres of words

mixing with all of vast Berlin
and the oxygen of Allah
worships his winding words
as all breath in his sufferings
and in this manner share the life
of this tiny fat German from Kenya
whose body has been twisted by pain
whose body has been untwisted by hope
whose body has been retwisted by pain
twist-twist- untwist-untwist-retwistytwist-ala!
into a black tiny fat knot
expressing essence
and experience
of exile in a way
that neither
Edward Said
nor
any writer
of such themes
ever
ever will
or
can.

The plates without food
fill with his litres of tears
and more rusty plates are fetched quick
(as if for an African presidential banquet)
from the rat-infested dim kneipe kitchen
yet the tears keep
coming and flowing
flowing and coming
coming and flowing
comingflowing etc etc etc
and Bee shivers, contorts
and convulses on the floor

his teardrops splashing new graffiti of woes on
walls and ceiling of the unlucky Afrikanische bar
making the stupefied fellow comrade customers (both legal and
illegal)
to turn wet in their own tears as the wail of Uncle B becomes a
treble spell.

Aisee! The cold leathery she-thighs
And the occasional.....he-thighs
he has caressed
and cold cell nights
he spent beside those
on flintstone floors of tram stations
See nights without moons, clothed in cold!
See days without suns, clothed in hunger!
Aisee! The cold crumbs of bland alien chop
thrown humanly
at hungry him
and
the cold foreign friendly fingers in gloves
that threw peanuts peacefully at him,
the coldest cold caucasian lips
that he sucked like sweet nectar of Uhuru fruits
and the coldness of cold itself
that sucks love, laughter, living out of him,
this the one coldness of coldness itself!
that rules the brooding skies of Europe
like an emotion of a poem written in winter
and hangs on the air of the continent
like a devil drawn from
the cold regions of a different hell --
all these and other tiny sub-themes
emanate like an Africanic genie old
from an unplugged sorcery gourd
out out out of Bee as he
writhes

contorting
in obscene convulsions
choking,
coughing,
urinating
and crying
his story forcing itself
in this epic wail of woe,
out out out not unlike
an incontinent excreting
stubborn human waste
from the nether side
exit.

Such is the wail
of tiny fat Uncle B
that it denies life itself
its deepest meaning and
makes the void of existence
open and swallow like an ogre mouth
both humanity and its common conscience.
The emptiness of living and
the life of such emptiness,
the indescribable and incredible
super massive black holes that swim
around the constellation of listeners to
Uncle B's tremulous soprano of suffering,
holes swirling swallowing us, swallowing Milky Way
Swallowing all all to the point of nothingness
and to realms where only the word "quiet"
becomes the most meaningful of the entire human words on
planet Earth

(reader kindly observe 4 minutes of silence and 23 seconds
please.....Silence. Ok go ahead)

It is only in this new silence
that one can find the old sanity
with which to be one
with the woe wail of Uncle B.

Here in the new silence that ushers in sense
Is where the plates full of Bee's tears now
piled high upon each other high high high

1

by

1

by

1

etc

etc

etc

from the tin tables to the bat-colonised ceilings
and from the creaking door made of Berlin history
to the kitchen door of rats and across the oval bar
finally

totter

totter

totter

dangerously

DANGEROUSLY!

before crumbling down

in clangs! clanging!

clings!

clinglingclings!

onto the now motionless

Uncle B

lying

-----*

on the cold
flint bar floor

and splash him
with
the teary waters of life
they carry
and
he

*

/

stirs back to life
bringing redemption to his silent listeners
as his wails echo echo away
and life is restored like in the European tale
of 1697 by the French fabulist Charles Perrault
known to the whole wide world as.....

Sleeping Beauty

or

La Belle au bois dormant.....

At the Gates of Mists

(a minute of silence for Okigbo)

Between
Batian and Nelion

At the Gate of Mists,
Words of Heaven
Words of Reason,

naked I
before You
stands!

Now ever in turmoil, ever ill at ease after each poll since
the Second Liberation Oh!

my offspring, behold them again a boisterous babel of
tongues asplit Oh!

my laws, see now the great rifts in what once was their
denotation Oh!

my lands, see red dust-dry farms, behold their thirst for
rain Oh!

my waters, see pinkish, my poll periods blood being spilt
Oh!

livestock, brittle bones holding in sacks of hide, behold
Oh!

skies, purplish, reflecting billowing civil strife below Oh!
frontiers, desecrated, my afflicted citizenry aflee Oh!

my...

my....

my...

So then do not bypass us from the heart of the earth under me,
I beg,

this new anaemic season of our pentannual
national polls.

By pass us not oh! when angels of reason you
release among nations

whose blood you favour
whose blood you savor
whose blood you crave for
AT THEIR TIMES OF THE VOTE
Oh Allah, Jehovah, Shiva and others of the
Divinity!

Now as my firstborn, this republic that
resembles Cain,
stares graveward like this,
my maternal hands rise higher heavenward like sacrificial
smoke
amidst rioting rumours
grandchildren are arming up
ready for the final war, their
apocalypse
accept urgently then my pleading words each
a droplet of this fresh poll blood sacrifice
accept them at the misty gates of your mighty
Mount of Snow abode at the

Equator

on top of my heart

I

Kenya

naked

plead

with

thee

....

(three minutes of silence for Post-Election
Violence victims)

Tears of Fish

Mseeiya!....There... Enheel!
 There will be no tears of fish or even humans
 this time when tides of street tidings reach us
 that all poll promises you made have died again
 on your fat tongue and were buried yet again
 in the spacious rooms of your soft rotund belly
 jellydancing inside your suave suits from Harrods
 like the yolk of affluence in the shell of Paul Pattni himself....

Hon. Politician-cum-Poet
 Do you read the books in the August House library?
 Books such like the various Holy Books among us:
 The Bible, The Quran, Ka, Vedas or Kitáb-i-Aqdas?
 Hear with ears of conscience, just as example
 what the 26th Chapter of the Quran says of your ilk:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

*Shall I inform you (of him) upon whom the Shaitans descend
 They descend upon every lying, sinful one,
 They incline their ears, and most of them are liars.
 And as to the poets, those who go astray follow them.
 Do you not see that they wander about bewildered in every valley?
 And that they say that which they do not do,*

So
 Honourable Politician-cum-Poet,
 There
 will be no tears of fish or even humans
 when we boycott this umpteenth requiem
 to your electoral promises and chase away
 under a hail of stone curses and placards
 your minions with their verses of invitation

to the grand banquet you are throwing again
to soothe soul sorrows in this vote-rich slum
by acting Obama as you abuse oral artistry
while we feed on plates upon plates of zeros
and drink chalices upon chalices of our sweat!

61
Green Card West

We shall bear down this beaten path
 raising cloudlets of fine dust as
 on limbs of will we hearken forth.
We shall grope forwards-forwards thus,
nightmares of our adult homes our sole motivation.

Yes. We shall stare forever West as we watch
 the wide horizon swallow more suns.
Following the old way shall we Westward forge
 as have others before and behind us,
in full pursuit of homes from our childhood dreams.

Upon hopes of better days rising with new suns
 shall we dream of our next lives even
 as we slog and slog ever forwards.
Ever forwards ever forwards never ever
backwards to glimpse lest like Lot's wife we forever retard.

As the full moon rises, our footsteps to guide
upon treacherous miles of the Westward trail,
trek onwards we shall without a dot of regret,
 following the timeless imprints of the feet
that ferried predecessors on the lengths of this way.

Indeed the roadside crickets shall sing their laments,
 and the savannah owls too shall hoot their fill,
No doubt Night's creatures shall in sorrow howl
and ex-homes in torment mourn the loss with the rest
but resolute will we remain on our way to the West.

Crying Stone of Apolilia

I saw
 the first republic of my motherland
 Squatting on the vast arid plains of our history
 Like a slave overburdened beyond belief by weights
 Of misery on trails of the tortuous nineteenth century
 the century whose span is the cradle of this republic forlorn.
 I saw it squatting black, sweating black under an angry sun
 Punishing her with whips of sun rays hot like a branding iron
 I saw her squat, limbs trembling with the weight of her memory
 She was there just squatting with a rivulet of urine trickle oozing
 From somewhere under the torn wrapper of kanga clothing her
 waist
 Under the punishing black sun of the equator, she squat in
 minutes of silence.

I saw
 What seemed like apparitions of those assassinated
 In line of duty serving the masses of our beloved motherland
 In the houses of governance whose corridors of power they
 loathed
 Desecrated, painted with graffiti of justice in the name of the
 constitution
 I saw them arrive one by one from their graves all across the
 land, this land
 They arrived without the clattering of their thin skeletons
 startling the republic
 As she just squat low there, urine and sweat trickling from her
 orifices somewhere
 Under the kanga around her convulsing waist, kanga ripped into
 the map of Apolilia
 I saw the apparitions line up behind her a skeleton parade yet
 she didn't startle at all

She just squat there tears, blood, sweat and urine trickling from
her important orifices.

I saw
A long shiny Benzful of apparitions arriving from the land
above the plateau
The plateau of history where all life becomes one and mankind
has no race
no religion,
no culture,
no ethnicity
no language,
no economy
mankind is one here, here difference is sameness
I saw the long limousine whipping cloudlets of dust behind it as
it came to a halt
By the brooding and squatting, bleeding and crying, sweating
and urinating republic
Apparitions disembarked and forming a line from the largest to
the fattest skeleton
This group faced or rather stood donges at the ready facing the
the the
frightened first republic squatting there on plains of history in
misery.
It is at this this exact time that the melody of our national
anthem
reached me from my standpoint high above Republic of
Apolilia
in the airy neighbourhood of dreams, national and personal
And as the last tune rolled out of the prayer of this music
this music that unites us all to each other and to the land,
I saw the apparitions in the second stanza collect the republic,
wipe her heart desert-stone dry, wipe her liquids dry dry dry
Then lifting her up, up up up up up uP UP UP UP!
High high sky high above their joined skulls

crush the skeletons of the long
limousineApooooooooHAPOHAUHAURIRIRALILIALI!!!

Wallahi!
This is when
I
immediately turned into the stone
that is this poem standing here still
on the white page of this facebook note
standing here before you like the mighty stone that cries-cries
teardrops of time not so far from Khayega out there in the
Kenyan west.

Harambee

(After the signing of the 28.02.2008 National Accord)

A hoe on a blank banner not the nationalist flag
full of memorial symbolism without meaning
may bring to doom the spirits of national angst
in our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner in villages and towns
lets us think about a new nationalism
that may bring to us the lost republic
of our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner is an omen of peace
let our iron foster not seasons of anomy
but bring the farms back from the bushes
in our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner is a sign of Harambee
let labour and not war be this union-force
that brings deliverance from the dissimilitudes
of our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner is a symbol of love
let the various sacrifices in our daily lives
bring us together in a ritual for redemptions
in our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner is a signal of unity
let the union of textile, wood and metal

bring us to the ultimate Rainbow Alliance
of our motherland.
Harambee!

A hoe on a blank banner in hamlets and hearts
lets us plant a new nationalism-in-diversity
bringing us harvests out of all identity fields
in our motherland.
Harambee!

64
End of an Error

When we lay spread on fields of poll war
with our heads resting on pillows of blood-
bronze-coloured our blood dying in the sun
A sun itself dying in scarlet skies at the equator....
When we lay spread across this great valley of rifts
desolate in pain amidst many a bleeding comrade
Fenced in by foe forces against our ethnic zealotry

When we thus lay spread like our broken banner
on the fields of the big battle against anti-tribalists
darkness steadily enveloping my eyes and the skies
as the end of the era of ethnic zealotry stands near us
What will be the very last tribal thoughts on my mind?

What will be the last thoughts on my tribal mind
on that final day of our capitulation and humiliation,
drenched in disgrace, gargling curses, oozing defeat
as conches of our foes signal in triumph, a new era?

What will be the last thoughts on my mind
on that final hour draped in lines of dirges
hemming us all in this page of national fate
written by History on the annals of our state?

What will be the last thoughts on my mind
on this day that the era of Tribalism among us ends
after rout and capitulation of forces of tribalism?

Awake on the death- bed of thought

I

ask
and
ask
and
ask
?

Soul Retrieval

(to jingle accompaniments and ululations after each stanza)

Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udoooongo! Hahooo!

With sirens of reason loud screaming!
 Let souls here relive the lost afternoons
 under tall saple Lusoola that swayed
 in tune with lows of the full oxen
 as our adolescent backs reclined
 on the furs of fertile rural earth
 made of fragrant riverside grass.

Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udoooongo! Hahooo!

With sirens of reason loud screaming!
 Let souls together like lovers' limbs
 twine in the warmth of memories
 and re-enter that world of leisure
 when tender shoots of kewa grass
 our tongue buds tickled and teased
 as we lazed young under a lazy sun
 listening to the rhythms of puberty.

Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
 Udoongo. Haho. Udoooongo! Hahooo!

With sirens of reason loud screaming!
Let souls wallow in puddlets of dung
freshly smelling the scent of grass
eased by home-bound humped ones
as they lazily with rise-fall of hooves
startle mating bugs, birds, ladybirds
from their various fine acts of free sex.
Let souls re-follow them flute in mouth
singing bull-fight songs to strong bulls
that plough the virginity of our earth
to forever give us harvest and health.

Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
Udoongo. Haho. Udooongo! Hahooo!
Udoongo. Haho. Udoooongo! Hahooo!

Address to the First Republic

(on the eve of the 4.08.2010 Referendum)

America! the dream that grew out of imperfection
Haven't her generations mended the constitution?
Mending the national bonds that tie races to races
And all races there to that land they all call home?

Kenyans! our own time-of-amendment is nigh
So hold firmly like to a dream your voting cards
For at hand is a true dream, the great rendezvous
Where our national past meets our common kismet!

Behold! our perfection-of-republic time nigh is
So hold firmly like to a dream your voting cards
For isn't it at the august referendum of 2010 AD
That you and I as one will win or lose our future?

Hold firmly this our dream but let loose only
When your vote, voice at the ballot of 2010
Will make the country we call mother live on
Will make the country we call mother live on.

Hold firmly but let loose not, let loose not
Your only vote, voice at the ballot of 2010
When your sole will is us to kill the nation
When your will is to cry foul then sunder us.

Both bonds binding us to us
And those binding our offspring
to this this homeland built on blood
can never ever be perfect in a generation:
take this time as a firm step towards perfection
speak peace with a yes vote step nearer to the Kenyan dream.

67
TRIBUTES

i
HAITI: 1.2010

"Preamble":

humanity tense
sends condolences as
tears in words console Haiti

Part I:

burp! BURRP!
EarthquUUUAKE!
cosmic constipation!

AMEN!
Sirens, screams,
quakes commence!

in Pòtoprens
both nature and life
now struggle to survive!

in Pòtoprens –
crushing ceilings
on citizens wailing!

in Pòtoprens –
gutting ghetto floors
below fast feet falling!

Claang!-Crassh!
coco-co-cocoughs
crying radio studios!

petrified
chihuahua puppies
in châteaux coffins!

howling omens
under a chapel bell,
an owl in a Haitian night!

"Run!"
UNO listening
Haiti on the line!

Part II:

Pupils of Hope
on eyes of global media,
a universal idea of Haiti

iron noise
man-made whirlwinds,
rescue from the world

delirium
duvet of fine dust,
digging steel claws

blood sweat
taut black skins
greasy green gangrene

ascending
an odour of death,

diseases, descending

a tanning face
behind a surgeon's mask
a mask of humanity

sunshine rays
patients on concrete
pain fenced in patience

baby doc
a cheque of euros
the past in atonement?

Haiti peers up
her future she sees now
not her own history.

planet in midlife
crises on her creasing face –
explanation of earthquakes?

"Postamble":

oblivious,
the planet marathons
on on on, on the path of Earths

ii

i neda agha sultani (or the smoke that my soul rides)
(1983-2009)

up
up
up
up

up
up

up
upper
UPPEST

and

as

i near the floor of heaven
i pause to wipe my scars clean
and eavesdrop on their plans
for my newest journey
between life and death
on a planet other than
earth.

they
point at my body
amidst riot, teargas
and bullet shells and
talk of vengeance
and a rising anger
in the meeting
chaired by !Him
aided by the
ayatollah.

i
hear the ayatollah
utter under his beard
few farsi wallahis and
many buts but murmurs
beyond my ears' reach
keep interrupting him.

keep interrupting him.
they mention ailing iran
they mention obama
they mention osama
they mention nukes
they mention the un
they mention hamas
they mention fatah
fatwa
farts
far
f!

!He is quiet all the time.

perhaps !He in apology
will tell them to let me
be born where i want
to be reborn. in a land
full of free Americans
that i too may live to
attain a grey head in a
Democracy -
that utopia i heard off
on global radios
growing
up
in
my
brief
life
that
just
ended
as I sit
in my black silk blouse

my jeans and aero sneakers
on a bed of my spilt varsity blood
on the floor of a teary-gassed Tehran -
the veiled face of my revolutionary motherland
as it suffocates under darker billows of politics, religion and
international relations.....

iii

Brutus, Fare On With Hope

(for Dennis Brutus 1924-2009)

now that you too have departed, Brutus
now that you too have travelled, Brutus,
the invisible islands in the ocean of space
are poised once more to get earth tidings
from this far flung corner of our universe.

(silence)

free souls that swim in the void of space
towards their assigned fate and stations
to inhabit places known only after death:
the various alien tenants of our universe
await you and the tidings that you bear.

(silence)

to yonder all verse, science and religion
where the owners of both life and death
govern the motions of souls and cosmos,
your soul now makes its outward journey.
let this last trip be full of hope from earth.

(silence)

Brutus, go now forth bravely on the path
of your soul's destination and as you glide
from us towards this orbit charted by Fate
for you, let your soul stare not earthwards
you are a poem of hope from earth to them.

(silence)

beyond this earth and its companion moon
beyond neighbour Mars and the Asteroids
beyond our gas neighbours farther a field
beyond this familiar Solar neighbourhood
bear, Brutus, the hope of humanity today.

(silence)

there will be the loneliness of space and its cold
there will be the longing for our familiar humanity
there will be the desire to turn like Lot's own wife
there will be the fear of sailing to your own fate
hold hold on to the same hope you passed to us.

(silence)

and even as you overtake the twin Voyagers
on their outward journey to their own destiny
inform them we remember them as we will you
and as these two bear messages from humanity
so do you now for those who await our tidings.

(silence)

on those invisible islands that you will find rest
as you revitalise yourself on your journey away
Brutus, offer those beings of these alien worlds
the verses of hope that govern mankind today,

cite Gandhi, King Jnr, Mandela, Kyi and Obama.

(silence)

Brutus, you are our verse gift to the universe
our sense of human struggles of the last century
so let then your soul fill them with our hope,
offer it too to wayfarers of various dimensions
and realms or the other beings who you will accost.

(silence)

they may find your verse both alien and unreal
for they will have heard of your protest poetry.
they may find your verse both alien and unreal
for maybe they still believe we love world wars.
tell them that it is peace we now seek in 21st C.

(silence)

and when you complete your time in revolution
around the vast black void in our galactic center
and off you spring from the Milky Way and away
you sail on on past various galaxies near and far,
recall, Brutus, hope is the verse that fuels Man.

(Shout: Brutus, Fare On With Hope!)

iv

Divan of Destiny:

(For Mbella Sonne Dipoko 1936-2009)

Old murram roads of rural Cameroon
vibrate with the voices of vibrant feet
as dirge drums thunder with abandon.

The vibrations mimic the ejaculation
of two bodies of young secret lovers
when their intertwined hearts in love
finally succumb to the beasts in Man
and Nature again vanquishes Culture.

New rumours are rife that a Mungo mask
is on the ascent and so too totem ghosts,
female bats and termites and she-spirits,
and a rich riverine scent of coming rains.
The feet thuds now thunder ever so closer,
and rains in teardrops now flow so freely.

Enter the mind-hut of this mask of verse.
behold how his virile adventurous tenants
unite in the fertility of their mixed fantasies
to exercise their sexualities and ecstasies
in their fictional existence on his Earth,
behold kin what beauty pristine in sex exists.

Let new copulation songs and earthy poetry
move now in lines of intimacy and imagery
to compose for us the final dirge for Dipoko
as his naked soul ascends amidst Tom-toms
beyond the equatorial virginity of his land
resting his body on its final divan of destiny.

About the Book

Wanjohi wa Makokha's *Nest of Stones* is the second book of poems since the publication of Sitawa Namwalie's *Cut off my Tongue* (Storymoja: 2009) devoted in principal to the moment of the 2007-2008 Kenyan Crisis, locally known as the Post-Election Violence (PEV). It collects over sixty pieces of his recent verse chosen on the basis of artistic merit and social relevance. The poems focus sharply on the tumultuous period between the General Elections of 2007 and August 4th Referendum of 2010. Some of the poems relate to events drawn out of earlier moments in Kenyan history but are invoked as contexts of the recent discord. Wa Makokha's interesting narratives are written in the form of lyrical folk verse and in common diction that is devoid of obscurantism and that offers much pleasure to readers especially when recited aloud. The verses are poignant vignettes, out of experiences of different communities and regions of Kenya, serving as repositories of the memory of a tumultuous moment in the life of a nation. The captivating poetry in this memorial collection derives its themes from the commonwealth of Kenyan experiences across ethnic and political divides. This idea of the interrelatedness of the peoples inhabiting the Kenyan space; is in a way, a veritable interrogation of the 'imagined community' leitmotif most often resorted to when analyzing the tensions of co-existence in the postcolonial world. The heart of these poems lies in Kenya but their philosophy of life is universal.

**"This is a kind of epic that all can consume, that compromises
nothing...."**

Binyavanga Wainaina, Director, The Chinua Achebe Center for African
Writers and Artists

**"wa Makokha writes poetry as architecture, poetry as sculpture,
poetry as a visual and structural engagement with the page. To read
this book is also to enter a gallery of words."**

Shailja Patel, Kenyan poet and social activist, *Migritude* (2010)

**....wa Makokha's lines are powerful enough to stand on their
own....His poetry is beautiful. Each poem is a literary gem in its
aesthetic beauty and emotion."**

Jasmin Ramsey, Editor, *PULSE*

“A precise and bold collection of poems, this. A broad collection of standard-grand-themes of African poetry, but themes revisited with a new eye; and with a local, culturally-nuanced perspective rooted in place and time – contextualised, and so avoiding trad clichés.”

Stephen Derwent Partington, Kenyan poet, *How to Euthanise a Cactus* (2010), Poetry editor, *Kwani?*

The poetry gathered in the *Nest of Stones* is totally absorbing. It is the manner in which the collection de/creates, interrogates, engages, and even collapses totalizing myths in Kenyan ethnic ‘fictions’ that makes it a new reading of the Kenyan state’s histories. The poems’ resistance of the absolute closure and thus openness to diverse readings of Kenyan stories/narratives, otherising, all-encompassing and so forth, adds an unmistakably fresh timbre to their poetic adequacy. The poetic gift, the wide-ranging and deep intelligence, and the genuine moral feeling are all in abundant evidence.

Professor Emilia Ilieva, Chair, Department of Literature, Egerton University

“The poems form a catena, a chain that parodies, taunts and subtly provides an alternative ethical dimension/vision. They are powerful, poetic, penetrating. The poet’s tone is both mystifying and unveiling, framing the issues without being too obvious or condescending. The content of the poems is strengthened by the physicality—the layout--- of the words on the page. Both content and form encourage the readers to take stock of the devil that has found a home inside their hearts and in their literal and symbolic homes. To exorcize this devil from their collective psyche, the poet forces the readers to engage in a subtle yet transparent critique of self and other. The aim of this kind of endeavour is to emancipate *uhuru* from the clutches of an aporia that interns freedom in “a sarcophagus in the vault of memory.” In this book, wa Makokha politicizes the poetics of memory in order to transcend a sordid and painful present that breeds nothing but more pain.”

Professor Ali Jimale Ahmed, Department of Comparative Literature, CUNY & Somalian Poet, *Fear is a Cow* (2002)

“A poignant poetically and emotionally charged collection – from the heart of a passionate young Kenyan with an authentic African voice – reflecting the rawness of the PEV era and forcing us to look in the mirror”

Sandra Mushi, Tanzanian poet, *Rhythm of my Rhymes* (2007)

“An enthralling work based on the articulation of current themes using unique designs of free verse....poignant, deceptively mild of language but deeply biting in tenor and figurative of mood. The poet’s strident message in these emotion-charged poems is that ethnicity-based national politics weakens a nation and retards its development”

Dr John Mugubi, Chair, Department of Theatre Arts and Film Technology, Kenyatta University.

“I am very impressed with the discipline, poise and sensitivity with which you approach your subjects and this uncommissioned vocation of ours – writing.”

Kangsen Feka Wakai, Cameroonian Poet, *Fragmented Melodies* (2007) and Editor, PalaPala

“....The power of your language here, and the depth, is a potent mix....Yours is a voice that certainly needs to be amplified. Thanks for allowing us to be a part of your evolution as a continental poet.”

Stephanie C. Horton, Editor, *Sea Breeze Journal of Contemporary Liberian Writings*

About the Poet

WANJOHI WA MAKOKHA (b.1979) lives and writes in Neukölln, Berlin. He teaches courses in African, South Asian and Caribbean literature at the Freie University of Berlin (FUB). He holds degrees from Kenyatta University. He is the author of *Reading M. G. Vassanji: A Contextual Approach to Asian African Fiction* (VDM: 2009) and co-editor of several volumes of literary criticism including *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore* with Jennifer Warzinek (Rodopi: 2010). His poetry has appeared in several magazines, e-zines and refereed scholarly journals across the world.

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“wa Makokha’s verse ... flings you at the edge of reflection and snatches you back into its clarity. In essence, it is beautiful.”

Dr Susan N. Kiguli, Ugandan Poet, The African Saga, (1998)

“...powerful, poetic, penetrating.”

Professor Ali Jimale Ahmed, Department of Comparative Literature, CUNY

Wanjohi wa Makokha’s *Nest of Stones* is the second book of poems, since the publication of Sitawa Namwalie’s *Cut off my Tongue* (Storymoja: 2009), devoted in principal to the moment of the 2007-2008 Kenyan Crisis. The crisis is locally known as the Post-Election Violence (PEV). The book collects over sixty pieces of his recent verse chosen on the basis of artistic merit and social relevance. The poems focus sharply on the tumultuous period between the General Elections of 2007 and August 4th Referendum of 2010. Some of the poems relate to events drawn out of earlier moments in Kenyan history but are invoked as contexts of the recent discord. Wa Makokha’s interesting narratives are written in the form of lyrical folk verse. The verses are poignant vignettes, out of experiences of different communities and regions of Kenya, serving as repositories of the memory of a tumultuous moment in the life of a nation. *Nest of Stones* derives its themes from the commonwealth of Kenyan experiences across ethnic and political divides. This idea of the interrelatedness of the peoples inhabiting the Kenyan space; is in a way, a veritable interrogation of the ‘imagined community’ leitmotif most often resorted to when analyzing the tensions of co-existence in the postcolonial world. The heart of these amazing poems lies in Kenya but their philosophy of life is universal.

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